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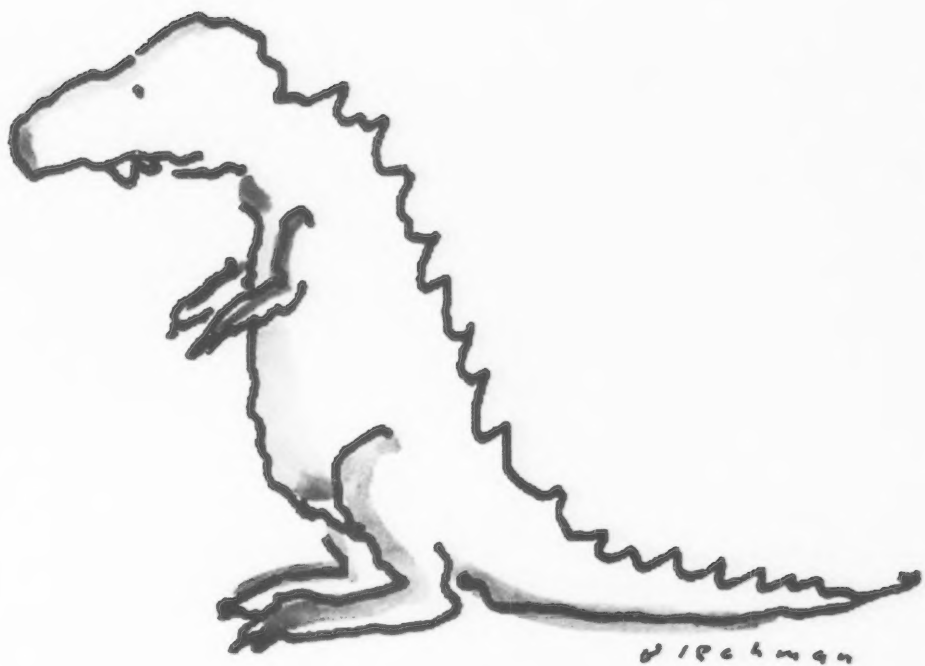
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MEDIAWEEK

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Clinton
Caves
In

The Times won the 1994 Gold Award for its July 18, 1993, Op-Ed page, which featured a contribution by a British historian, Gerald Fleming. His article, "Engineers of Death," was based on his research into recently available wartime archives in Moscow, which reported the testimony of four German engineers and technicians who designed and built concentration camp crematoriums during World War II. The page also featured an "In America" column by Bob Herbert, about President Clinton's policy on gays in the military.

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"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM . . . TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT" From the founding editorial, 1961

World News: Truth and Consequences

"Covering Regional and Ethnic Conflicts" was the subject of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism's November 17 First Amendment Leadership breakfast. Floyd Abrams, senior adviser to the Poliak Center for First Amendment Studies and William J. Brennan Jr. Visiting Professor at the school, was the moderator. The panelists were Seymour Topping, administrator of the Pulitzer Prizes and Sanpaolo Professor of International Journalism at the school; David Marash, correspondent for ABC News; and Anne Nelson, a former director of the Committee to Protect Journalists, whose remarks are excerpted here:

There is a crisis in international news reporting in the United States — and not one that should simply be blamed on the reporters, the gatekeepers, or the owners. We know that there is stagnation, and even shrinkage, in the number of international stories in the media and the number of correspondents in the field for most U.S. media outlets. But the primary reason for this decline is an audience that expresses less and less interest in the international stories that do appear. What we're increasingly missing, as a culture, is connective tissue to bind us to the rest of the world.

Mid-twentieth-century Britons were connected to far-off continents by the legacies of their disappearing empire. World War II had the same sort of impact on the U.S. public — everyone knew someone, loved someone, who had been shipped off to a place they once couldn't pronounce. The underlying lesson to this experience was not that Americans had become avid consumers of international news for all time to come. It was something less cheering: *you can only rely on international news to turn a profit when it's actually domestic news.* And the most certain way for international news to become domestic news is through a U.S. military intervention — when it's "our boys" — "over there."

I know a great many decent people working in American newsrooms who are passionate about covering international stories, beating their heads bloody against all the obstacles put in their way. They end up going after strong images of war and starvation — because that's what they think will reach their audience. But it is impossible, as a human being, to fully absorb these horrific images without experiencing the will to do something about it.

So as coverage of an international crisis builds, the will to do something, anything, about it becomes overwhelming. It drives public opinion, it drives the administration, and it drives the story's shelf life. But all too often, doing "something, anything" about a crisis means military intervention for lack of a better alternative, and in news terms, the more dramatic the intervention, the more seemingly effective.

Unfortunately, intervention is a blunt instrument. It can only accomplish simple things. It can reopen oil pipelines. It can remove or restore a head of state — on a good day. But

it can't do complicated things, like creating a functioning democracy where none ever existed, or dismantling a billion-dollar drug industry that is the only crutch for a crippled third world economy.

International news coverage has been further complicated by the information revolution. The generation that learned about the world through World War II had a canonical set of media to rely on that responded to a hierarchical structure. That structure has been blown apart over the last few years. One person's primary news source might be an on-line financial service transmitted to her home computer while another's might be a tabloid television "news" show on cable.

People in the news business are constantly facing the question "Why should we care?" about international stories. We need to think hard about the answers that are implicit in news coverage. Should people care about international crises based on humanitarian concerns? If so, what are the criteria for how much information is presented about them, and how directly the U.S. should be involved?

Yet when crises are extensively covered, as in Somalia, the story creates its own momentum. There is strong evidence that, in the news media's impetus to cover and play out the story, and in the public's will to "do something" to relieve the suffering, the United States undertook a policy that helped no one and possibly did harm. We should ask whether the media have a responsibility, as they present their devastating images of suffering, to acknowledge that these images could impel the country towards intervention, and to take on the question, "What is present in this situation that intervention can actually fix?"

There are other good answers to the question "Why should we care?" but they aren't easy answers. We are living in an era where the forces that rule our lives are more internationalized than ever. International trade is coming to dominate our economy; the distinctions between local cultures and a world culture are disappearing. News travels around the world in a matter of moments. Most Americans don't understand these phenomena, and they need to.

We are inhabiting a strange moment in which the story selection process of a group of [CNN] editors in Atlanta has a remarkable degree of influence on the world's primary peace-keeping force. The United Nations, paralyzed for decades by the superpower deadlock in the Security Council, must respond to an international agenda that seems arbitrary and episodic. Governments from around the world are looking to the United Nations for leadership, yet our own political process has not sorted out the most basic questions of whether foreign policy should be conducted as an elite or a public concern. Either way, we owe it to the world that the decision is an informed one. Our international news coverage must measure the consequences of its impulses to help us achieve that end. ♦

LETTERS

THE AGE OF IRON PYRITE, MAYBE?

In CJR's new Technology column ("The Golden Age, Maybe?" November/December), Stephen D. Isaacs says that the "basic problem of journalism has always been length." And since technology now allows both journalist and reader to file and retrieve anything on demand, including full texts and background material, the "basic problem of journalism evaporates into the ether," and "the golden age of real Journalism is about to begin." All that with as much of a straight face as print can bear.

In fact, the basic problem of journalism is not "length" but media conglomeration and the consequent reduction of staff, diversity, and time to do an adequate job. As to the retrieval of reams of background material, there is no evidence that the number of news readers who search databases is any larger than (or different from) those who use the library to do their research — free.

Technology makes news processing faster and more efficient for those who own or can access and have the time, money, and interest or need to use it. But one-third of all children and nearly half of African-Americans never see a computer in school, and even fewer see one at home. Only about one in three of the more affluent homes has a computer. For the vast majority, newspaper technology means speeding up, chopping up, and jazzing up the news. For journalists, it means further loss of control to a few wholesalers and global marketers of media "software."

Technology, as it is used, also speeds mindless instant twenty-four-hour imagery of mayhem and trivia, and exacerbates the gap between the information rich and information poor. Diversity of perspectives, not fitting into the machine, and democratic citizen initiative, not technocratic fantasies, can liberate journalists — and the uses of technology — from the new "golden age of

real Journalism" imposed on them.

GEORGE GERBNER
Professor and Dean Emeritus
The Annenberg School for Communication
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, Pa.

CENTERS OF ATTENTION

Lloyd Cutler is right about some points: Washington coverage tends to vastly overemphasize the president and downplay everyone else ("On the Presidency and the Press," CJR, November/December). That's true in the way major news organizations deploy their resources — over-covering a president's every sneeze and golf game — and in the way most every newspaper, even those without their own White House reporter, plays Washington news.

Travel to almost any city on any given day, pick up the local paper, and page-one Washington news is, de facto, White House news, culled from the AP, *The Washington Post*, or *The New York Times*. It is a grossly distorted portrait of Washington — as if the president exists in a vacuum — which can't just be blamed on the White House regulars but on the editors back home at the smallest newspapers.

For its part, the Clinton White House insists on courting the *Post*, the *Times*, and a small number of other extremely powerful opinion-leading organizations; it has not, however, sought to diffuse its message among other news outlets. And believe it or not, there are others: papers from Seattle to Palm Beach maintain their own people in Washington but this White House has largely ignored them in order to court more influential organizations. By this point during the Bush administration, I'd met in small conferences with Bush twice; so far, I've yet to be in such a setting with Clinton.

A good number of hometown editors have the same problem the Clinton White House does. They buy into the influence of the *Post*, the *Times*, and the AP — to an extent, understandably. What's not so understandable is that, like Lloyd Cutler, they complain bitterly about the outcome of their

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RICHARD PARKER
Washington correspondent
Albuquerque Journal
Arlington, Va.

MYSTERY WRITER

Bill Gates and Microsoft have long since solved David Halberstam's only flaw as a writer ("The Education of a Journalist," CJR, November/December).

When I arrived on the copydesk of the old Nashville *Tennessean* in late 1958, David already not only was a solid reporter, but he was the world's sloppiest typist. In his haste to put words on paper, he would xxxx out, type above words, underneath words, on top of words. It was up to the unsung pencil-and-pastepot crew to walk over to his desk a few times a night to have him decipher the hieroglyphic. What usually emerged was a pure gem.

I remember him not for the many big stories he wrote but for the small, often overlooked stories that he made his own. One example: an old man and woman lived in abject poverty. The man died. While turning over their mattress, the woman found some \$5,000 he had squirreled away. Undertakers convinced her the late departed would want her to blow it all on a lavish funeral. She did. Dave took that story and made it sing and dance with arms and legs, in Mencken's words.

DOLPH HONICKER
The Tennessean
Nashville, Tenn.

PARADISE RETAINED

Spencer Sherman's criticism of Honolulu's press ("Letter from Hawaii," CJR, September/October) missed the real angle: Sherman thinks Hawaii's press should learn to be more like the mainland press; but in fact, the nation's newspaper readers could learn a lot from Hawaii's.

Sherman's terms, "provincial," "unethical," "timid," "uncompetitive," and "short-viewed," are applied as easily to mainland papers as to any of Hawaii's. More interesting is that Hawaii's population resists journalists making events seem more newsworthy than they are. As Sherman notes, Hawaii is "largely made up of Asian immigrants," (actually, they are more likely the descendants of Asian immigrants) who "covet privacy" and "shun controversy." Hawaii's residents intuit that their world is often not as it is portrayed. They understand that the ostensible scandal is usually a ploy by some person who wants to manipulate them into buying or voting or decrying on the shallowest

possible grounds.

The readership may seem lethargic, but isn't it possible that the media tend to overreact? Maybe it is more important for a community to be led in debate about how best to preserve aloha than to worry about whether another scandalous allegation is news.

RONALD P. LOUI
Associate professor
Washington University
St. Louis, Mo.

DEADLINE HEADLINE

On September 5, we published a stupid headline: ATOMIC BOMBERS CRITICIZE ENOLA HOMOSEXUAL EXHIBIT. It [changing the name GAY to HOMOSEXUAL] was a careless mistake that occurred on deadline, as do most stupid mistakes at smaller newspapers. It was not the result of gay bashing or any other overt (or subvert) political maneuver.

We fully expected to be humiliated in "The Lower case." What we didn't expect was to be accused of "overzealous application of traditional terminology when describing a certain type of sexual orientation" in your "Darts and Laurels" section. To raise this headline above the level of SUGGEST SEX ACTS IN OFFICE [The Lower case, CJR, November/December] and to suggest that any ulterior motive existed — especially in the absence of hard facts — is offensive to myself and the *Herald*.

MARK M. SWEETWOOD
Editor
Northwest Herald
Crystal Lake, Ill.

MUG SHOT SHOT DOWN

Your September/October cover story, "How O.J.'s Lawyer Works the Press," purported to be about Simpson's lawyer Robert L. Shapiro. I've seen the Simpson coverage and I know there are pictures of Shapiro alone, Shapiro with fellow attorneys, and Shapiro in front of a microphone. Yet you chose a cover picture that barely shows any of Shapiro's face and focuses on Simpson.

Of the two inside pictures, in fact, only one really shows Shapiro. The other is of the back of his head and — surprise! — Simpson's face.

Why did you choose to use these particular photos? Because Robert Shapiro's mug doesn't sell magazines. O.J. Simpson's face does. Shame on you for jumping on the bandwagon that already has made this case the most over-publicized event since Geraldo opened Capone's vault. You should adhere to higher standards and set a better example.

LYNN EDGE
Birmingham, Ala.

WHOWHATWHENWHEREWHY

the I-man and the media elite

The I-man was definitely on a roll. Scowling behind the mike in his high-tech basement studio in Astoria, Queens, he ridiculed Bill Clinton, sparred with White House adviser Paul Begala, yucked it up with Al D'Amato, swapped insights with ABC's Jeff Greenfield, and arranged a date for his brother, Fred.

Then, without missing a beat, Imus turned to me and announced what was really on his mind: the traumatic experience of washing his "wiener" with rodent-like Mickey Mouse soap during a recent stay at Disneyland. Talk about quick transitions.

Over the past year, as his syndicated radio show has spread to forty-five cities, Don Imus has become a morning ritual for much of the incestuous media community. And journalists do more than listen: Dan Rather, Tim Russert, Connie Chung, Anna Quindlen, Frank Rich, Cokie Roberts, and Greenfield are among the regular call-in guests. Politicians too, from Bob Dole to Al Gore, who recently asked to come on *Imus in the Morning*.

You get good buzz from the show. The morning I was on — our topic was "how journalists can't suck enough," as Imus so elegantly put it — I got instant feedback from the editor of *The Boston Globe*,



Why do big-name journalists like Imus in the morning?

the deputy managing editor of *The Washington Post*, and the publicist for *60 Minutes*.

All of which raises the cosmic question: What gives? Why do card-carrying members of the media elite tune in to a guy who, when he's not dissecting the news, is just as likely to be playing a parody of Rush Limbaugh singing "That's Why the First Lady is a Tramp," crudely insulting Peter Jennings, or discussing his aforesaid wiener?

Here's one theory: journalists must strive to be objective and measured. Imus gets to viciously attack people we must be polite to. As straight man Charles McCord, seated to his right, reads the headlines, Imus says whatever hideous thing pops into his head. One recent morning, Imus called Newt Gingrich "a man who would eat roadkill," O.J. Simpson a "moron," Alice Rivlin a "little dwarf," Robert Novak the man with "the worst hair on the planet," and Ted Kennedy "a fat slob with a head the size

of a dumpster." No wonder media types find him fascinating: he breaks all our rules. Some of us relish the naughtiness of a man who can call the president of the United States a "fat pantload" and still get him on the program.

Another factor: he shares our cultural zeitgeist. He reads *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* and the New York tabloids, watches *MacNeill/Lehrer* and *Meet the Press* and knows rock 'n' roll. His brilliant comedic bits with the impersonators who play Richard Nixon, Ross Perot, Walter Cronkite, and Rush Limbaugh appeal to the insider audience.

Not to all of us, however. Morton Kondracke, executive editor of the Washington, D.C., *Roll Call*, is one example of a journalist who finds Imus to be too much. He was so disgusted by Imus's routine — particularly a rap song called "Pimp Slap the Ho," which bore some relation to Clinton and Paula

Jones — that he refused to do commentaries on Imus's Washington station. "I didn't want any part of it. It's over my line," he says. Kondracke nevertheless concedes that he sometimes tunes in, and that Imus can be funny.

Russert, NBC's Washington bureau chief and the host of *Meet the Press*, says he finds some bits "distasteful," but adds, "It's a very smart variety show. Anyone who dismisses it is being a little aloof and arrogant. If you're interested in politicians and pundits, they are more refreshingly candid on that program than where you normally see and hear them."

"It's done in such good humor," says CBS's Rather. "If you can't take a joke, go somewhere else."

Getting friendly with Imus, however, can be dangerous. *Nightline*'s Jeff Greenfield once made the mistake of inviting Imus to a dinner party. The I-man made fun of the invitation on the air and then raffled it off to a listener, whereupon an embarrassed Greenfield withdrew it.

True, Imus doesn't have the top-rated morning show (he's fourth in Boston, tied for fourth in New York, and twenty-sixth in Washington). But many of his two million daily listeners — about two-thirds of them men — are the kind of high-income, highly educated folks advertisers love.

Which leads to another reason that big-name journalists and politicians faithfully arise at the crack of dawn to phone in.

"Imus moves the merchandise," says Rather, who plugged his new book in a recent appearance. About 200 people showed up for Rather's Manhattan book signing that day, "and at least 100 of them said, 'I heard you on Imus this morning.'"

Howard Kurtz

Kurtz, a Washington Post reporter, is the author of *Media Circus: The Trouble with America's Newspapers*.

a mid-life crisis in texas

Ronnie Dugger, founding editor, eminence grise, and, in recent years, absentee father of *The Texas Observer*, spent a number of years asking uncomfortable questions of fellow Texan Lyndon Johnson. When Dugger was not around, LBJ liked to grumble to visit-

ing Texas politicians: "If you look back in that line somewhere, you'll find a dwarf."

Just what the thin-skinned son of the Texas hill country meant by his weirdly ingenious insult is unclear, but to me the comment seemed aimed not so much at Dugger — a man of average height, by the way — but at *The Texas Observer* itself. Small, pathetically underfunded, its editors and writers grossly underpaid, the *Observer* from the beginning was a dwarf kicking at the shins of tall Texas Democrats it thought had abandoned the party's liberal ideals. It was just tall enough to bite the butt of the Texas party establishment of Lyndon Johnson and John Connally and the oil, business, and financial titans who controlled the party and the state.

Dugger was twenty-four when a group of Texas liberals offered him the job of running their new magazine. The year was 1954, and they were an endangered species; McCarthyism was rampant. "I was leaving

for Corpus Christi to get a job on a shrimp boat, jump ship in Mexico, move back to Texas among the wetbacks, and somehow write a novel from that," Dugger recalls. "Yet here was a real chance to make a difference."

For a long time, the biweekly journal did indeed make a difference. It was the only voice in the state seeking to tell the stories that so desperately needed telling — stories of a corrupt and inefficient state legislature, of racial injustice, of corporate rape and government acquiescence, all the stories *The Dallas Morning News*, the *Houston Chronicle*, and the state's other urban dailies seemed happy to ignore. "By the sheer force of its ardor and its talent, it was read by everyone in Texas whose opinions had authority," former *Observer* and *Harper's* editor Willie Morris recalled in his autobiography, *North Toward Home*.

That was yesterday. Last October, a couple of weeks before the November 8 elec-

tion, *The Texas Observer* celebrated its fortieth anniversary, and like many forty-year-olds, the magazine found itself occupied with soul-searching and reassessment. Still small and pathetically underfunded, its circulation hovering close to 7,500, still "a journal of free voices," and still "the tyrant's foe, the people's friend," the *Observer* finds that much has changed since the days when Dugger and his colleagues made it worth reading.

Its "ardor and its talent" have worn down over the last twenty years or so; its opinions have become a bit shopworn. Despite the occasional *Observer* scoop or compelling essay you won't find in any other Texas publication, the magazine is no longer required reading.

With the coming of *Texas Monthly* and the development of a more enterprising capital press corps in Austin, the *Observer* is no longer the sole outlet in the state for writers eager to do serious political

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TRADEMARK CHECKLIST

This annual "Trademark Checklist" is a handy guide to some of the best known trademarks. More than 700,000 trademarks are currently registered federally. This list is part of one newly compiled by the International Trademark Association that correctly lists over 4,000 trademarks and service marks with their generic terms.

The "Trademark Checklist" at right is a quick reference to help people in communications use trademarks accurately. Here are a few important usage guidelines that will help prevent letters of complaint from trademark owners:

- Trademarks are proper adjectives and should be capitalized and followed by a generic noun or phrase
- Trademarks should not be pluralized
- Trademarks should not be used in possessive form
- Trademarks are never verbs

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and investigative journalism or to produce compelling, literate essays about Texas.

Success of a sort also eroded the *Observer's* influence. In the early days, when Texas McCarthyites and Democrats for Eisenhower and know-nothings in the state legislature offered targets as inviting as tin ducks in a shooting gallery, when the issues were as sharply edged as cut glass, the *Observer* was fueled with passion and a sense of purpose. Over the years, as the political battles were won and lost and re-won again, as Ann Richards and other politicians loosely associated with "the *Observer* crowd" occasionally emerged victorious, the sense of mission that infused the *Observer* of old began to shade to gray, and the magazine became just another journal of predictable left-wing opinion.

Dugger, who has not lived in Texas for years, used the fortieth-anniversary celebration as an opportunity to

SOUNDBITE

"Stop thinking about it as the information highway and start thinking about it as the marketing superhighway. Doesn't it sound better already?"

Don Logan, president and chief executive of Time Inc., to the annual meeting of the Association of National Advertisers.

announce both his retirement as publisher and the creation of a new *Texas Observer*: the magazine will now be published by the Texas Democracy Foundation, a nonprofit entity whose board consists of columnist Molly Ivins, radio talk-show host Jim Hightower, and other *Observer* veterans. In other words, the perennially non-profitable *Texas*

Observer is now actually non-profit, able to seek foundation money and solicit tax-deductible contributions from individuals.

So is there a place in the journalistic universe for a new *Texas Observer*? Ivins argues that the *Observer* is important not just for what it covers but for the example it sets as a quirky, obstinate, independent journal. "Mainstream journalism today is so caught up in shallow crap and celebrification, it's absolutely terrifying," she says. "We need more of what the *Observer* does all over this country." Dugger, in his characteristically earnest and impassioned way, argued at the anniversary celebration that the problems of the 1990s that "the new *Observer* confronts — and all of us confront — are much, much more serious and are not state but national and international."

Meanwhile, the Republican blitzkrieg on November 8 could be just what the new *Texas Observer* needs. An

Observer with Phil Gramm and Dick Arme in its sights could well discover that life does indeed begin at forty.

Joe Holley

Austin writer Holley was editor of The Texas Observer from 1981 until 1984.

ollie and the media

a love/hate story

"Don't believe the liberal media" has become a standard conservative refrain. Some politicians on the right, meanwhile, have taken to baiting the press in public while wooing it in private. Oliver North is a case in point.

On the campaign trail in Virginia last year, Senate candidate North rarely lost an opportunity to berate "The

Everyday, irregardless of his homework, Jeffrey went "rollerblading" because it was to nice to lay around with his nose in a english book.

Of the 7 errors in this headline, "rollerblading" as a verb strikes us as most extreme. Other common misuses of the Rollerblade brand name include "rollerblades, rollerbladers, blades, bladers and blading." Remember, the careful writer skates on in-line skates known as Rollerblade® skates.

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A pair of filmmakers have focused on North and the press

Washington Compost," and "The New York Crimes." His fundraising used the press as the bogeyman, decrying what he called "one of the most ruthless and downright vicious smear campaigns in American political history." North mined an anti-press sentiment that ran almost as deep as anti-incumbent fever.

But as the reporters on the campaign trail know, his day-to-day relationship with the press was far more nuanced than his rhetoric.

Soon the public will get a chance to peer behind the cur-

tain and see how North and the press really interacted during the nasty Virginia campaign. Two independent filmmakers, David Van Taylor and R.J. Cutler, tailed North from his announcement in January 1994 to the November election, shooting a verité-style documentary, *Semper Fi*. The filmmakers plan to raise additional funds for postproduction in the spring, then release the film next fall or winter, on the cusp of the 1996 presidential primary season.

Cutler previously produced *The War Room*, the behind-the-scenes documentary on the Clinton presidential campaign that focused on political strategist James Carville. And although *Semper Fi*'s featured player is North himself, and opponents Charles Robb and L. Douglas Wilder will have time on screen, it's a reporter, *The Washington Post*'s Donald P. Baker, who shares the limelight with North.

Why Baker? "He is in some ways the personification of the

liberal media, which North is constantly bashing and yet on whom he totally relies," says Van Taylor. Baker, a sixty-one-year-old reporter who has been at the *Post* for twenty-four years, is "a bit of central casting," says Cutler. "He's brilliant, amusing, an engaging character, and he fulfills the need of a filmmaker for a character who's passionate about what they do and are doing it extremely well in high-stakes circumstances."

Baker's newspaper was certainly a favorite target of North. "One of the stories he likes to tell," Baker says, "is that every morning when he gets up, he reads the Bible and *The Washington Post* — so that he can get both sides." But the reporter says that North's bark seemed worse than his bite. His rhetoric "doesn't translate into a different relationship between the candidate, the staff, and the media," he says. "They're professionals. We get along fine. It's pretty much part of his schtick.

It's an act."

That might surprise North's supporters. So might the amount of joking, schmoozing, and bargaining that goes on between North and his presumed media foes in *Semper Fi*. So might any number of scenes, like the one with the missing press van, which brought North's caravan to a grinding halt while five staff members stood on the highway with cellular phones and walkie-talkies, frantically trying to locate them — the liberal media. Or North and Baker at dinner, casually arguing about press behavior.

"I was out having drinks with some of North's people last night, and we were talking about this [relationship]," says Baker. "We have a lot more in common than we have in opposition to each other, because we all have this great interest in government and public policy."

Journalists, Baker fears, are "going in the direction of lawyers, politicians, and used

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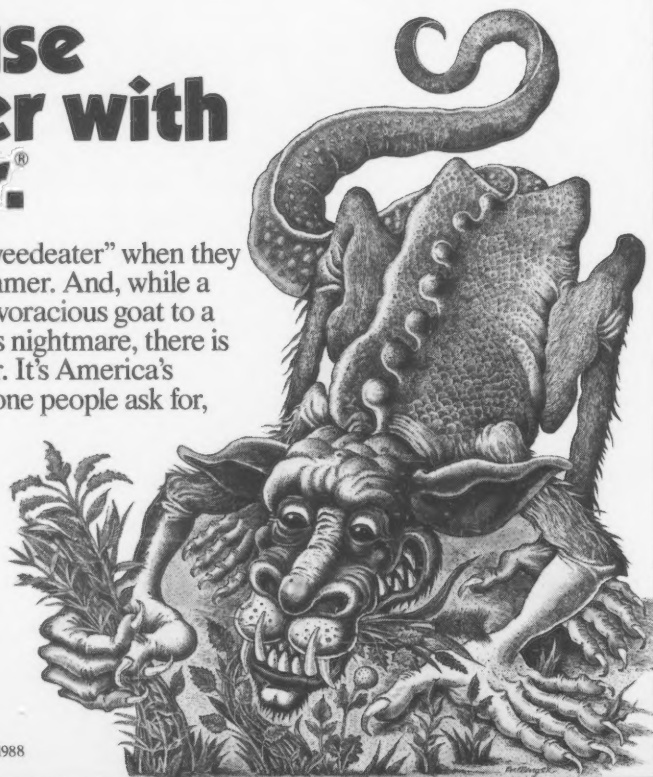
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car salesmen in how the public views us. Then along comes somebody like North or Pat Robertson who takes advantage of that and baits them. These people really do get fired up. And we're being used."

Patricia Thomson

Thomson is editor of *The Independent Film & Video Monthly*.

go east, young journalist

It takes a brave person to visit the third-floor offices of *The Prague Post*, an English-language weekly at Na Porici 12, Praha 1, in the beautiful capital of the Czech Republic. Visitors have to test their athletic prowess by jumping off an elevator platform that refuses to stop. There is no time for hesitation.

The elevator may be a deterrent to some, but it has not scared off the staff, mostly American-born and -educated editors. They have happily fled their homeland for expatriate journalism in liberated central Europe. Given the frontier conditions that the elevator represents, the question is, why?

Martin Huckerby, the *Post's* British editor, has an answer: job satisfaction. "I read somewhere that job satisfaction in the States among journalists is way down," he says. "It's no surprise that many good people are coming here, not just because of the quality of life, but because they want to work in an exciting environment." *The Prague Post*, he says, provides "a seat on the balcony of Europe with a glass of Czech Pilsen in hand. There are wonderful stories here. The whole society is still in convulsions."

Founded in 1991 by a pair of young Americans, the *Post* has a circulation of some 14,000, with an estimated readership of 35,000, a figure that breaks

SOUNDBITE

"You've shown us that great stories, the ones that people want to see and read...are the ones about real people back in those towns we were in a hurry to leave."

Gil Klein, president of the National Press Club, introducing Charles Kuralt at a press club dinner in Washington, where Kuralt received the Fourth Estate Award.

down into 35 percent American and 29 percent Czech and Slovak, with the balance made up of tourists and an international audience. It's a young, educated readership, the paper's surveys show, and one willing to pay the hefty newsstand price

of 30 crowns, or about \$1.00.

Post editors are paid an average of \$500 a month, peanuts in Western terms. Yet editor-in-chief Alan Levy says he regularly receives job applications from people earning \$50,000 to \$60,000 at such papers as *The Atlanta Constitution* and *The Hartford Courant* who are looking for new horizons. According to Levy, there are now sixteen similar English-language papers in Eastern Europe — including three in Moscow, one in Tallinn, Estonia, and at least three in Budapest — many attracting similar Western talent.

The *Post's* business editor, Dean Calbreath, a thirty-nine-year-old transplanted Californian, may be typical. He left the U.S. after seven years of writing about business, including a stint at the *San Francisco Business Times*. "The stories I was covering were respectable, but I was in a little bit of a rut," he says. "I was getting older and I had never lived abroad." Though

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he took an enormous pay cut, Calbreath insists that he has improved his standard of living greatly. "I'm living in a much better neighborhood than the one I lived in in San Francisco," he says.

Reporting in Prague, on the other hand, can be more difficult. "The infrastructure is terrible here," Calbreath says. "Telephones don't work, fax machines are slow, the mechanics of getting interviews is hard. And some segments are still suspicious of English-language newspapers."

Still, with so many deep changes to report and analyze, the work is rewarding. Business news is so important in Eastern Europe that the *Post* runs a special monthly section on banking and finance to supplement its weekly business coverage. Among the major stories Calbreath follows: the privatization of state-owned industries, the issue of restitution of property confiscated by the communists, and continuing problems of unemployment and bankruptcy.

Another expatriate Ameri-

can at *The Prague Post* is Melissa Morrison, a twenty-seven-year-old who left *The Dallas Morning News*, where she worked as a \$25,000-a-year suburban news reporter, to become a regular free-lance feature writer at the *Post*, at greatly reduced pay. "The time to do it was now," she explains, "before I got too tied down."

Ky Krauthamer, thirty-five, left a design position at a literary book publisher in Portland, Oregon, and now finds himself editing restaurant and food reviews and columns for the *Post*. "Life is better and worse here," he says. "Worse because it can be frustrating to deal with the bureaucracy and hard to get an entry into Czech life that is not superficial. Better because it is more exciting and because Prague is a less predictable place to live in."

Roslyn Bernstein

Bernstein is the director of the journalism program at Baruch College, City University of New York.

young writers, young readers

a success story

At a glance, *Vox* looks like any number of other grass-roots, urban, alternative newspapers: eye-catching anarchic cartoons and coverage of such subjects as violence, hunger, teen pregnancy, or black/Jewish relations, all laced with a bit of attitude and street talk. The striking difference, though, is that *Vox: The Voice of Our Generation*, is written and designed entirely by teenagers. *Vox's* staff members are between thirteen and nineteen, most are girls, and more than half are African-American; its readership (estimated at 40,000) is about the same.

In May 1993, thirteen teenagers from all over metropolitan Atlanta, with the help of their sole paid adult adviser, twenty-three-year-old Rachel Alterman, launched *Vox* out of

Alterman's apartment. A former Scholastic, Inc. intern, she had been inspired by *NYC*, another youth-run newspaper.

Only a third of teens in the South and less than half of urban teens nationwide read a newspaper regularly, but *Vox* seemed to break through. Although *Vox* is not officially connected to Atlanta's schools they have consistently been its main distribution venue, and the premiere issue — which included a report on teen-agers who have children — was a hit with both teachers and students.

The second issue, however, did not please everyone in the Atlanta-area school community. It had far more substance than the first — lengthy and thoughtful reportage on teen violence, Atlanta's mayoral elections, and alternative schools. It also fea-

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tured SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW, a sympathetic story on a local support group for gay teen-agers. That got *Vox* banned from one major school system, Clayton County in suburban Atlanta, which has a policy against presenting homosexuality as an acceptable way of life.

The incident angered and worried the *Vox* team. Since a 1988 Supreme Court decision — *Hazelwood vs. Kuhlmeier* — granted school officials wide-ranging authority over the content of high school papers (see "Fallout from *Hazelwood*," *CJR*, May/June 1988), young journalists have been far more subject to adult censorship, but *Vox*, operating independently of any school, was supposed to be free from such constraints.

As it turned out, the censors ultimately did *Vox* a favor. Local TV was abuzz with the story and *The Atlanta Constitution's* staid editorialists took the Clayton County principals to task, praising *Vox's* "ideals and passion," and excerpting a *Vox* editorial by Clayton



Krista Nelson and Valerie Burton at work on Atlanta's *Vox*, the independent teen-run bi-monthly

County high-schooler Candie Stiles, headlined ADULTS, WAKE UP! KNOWLEDGE IS POWER! The *Vox* team distributed the paper to Clayton County in person at youth centers, community colleges, libraries, and health clinics. As a result of the publicity, more students started reading *Vox* and more joined its staff, which is now up to fifty.

Vox, meanwhile, has continued to cover the explosive terrain of the culture wars, run-

ning not only articles that explore gay issues but opinion pieces promoting, for example, condom use and opposing voluntary school prayer, including "moments of silence."

The independent bimonthly is one of the newest in a recent wave of independent newspapers by and for urban teen-agers, all part of a loose seven-teen-year-old network known as Youth Communication. In 1977, the first YC paper, *New Expression*, was founded in

Chicago, by educators Craig Trygstad and Sister Ann Heintz, both of whom were inspired in part by the radical theories and practices in education of that era, which stressed hands-on learning and individual expression. Youth papers in Delaware, New York, Toronto, Los Angeles, and Boston followed *New Expression*.

Now, in the '90s, Youth Communication seems to be taking off again. New YC papers, meanwhile, have popped up in Indianapolis (*Teen Track*); San Francisco (*YO!*); Washington, D.C. (*Young D.C.*); Detroit (*Motown Teen*); Hartford (*Metro Bridge*); New Haven (*Progeny*); and Palm Beach County, Florida (*Spike*), as well as Atlanta's *Vox*.

Funding tends to be independent youth papers' biggest problem, and *Vox* is no exception. Sometimes local papers help out. *Vox* has been discussing a relationship with the *Journal-Constitution*, since the current combination of foundation grants, donated office

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The winners in 1994 for reporting that occurred in 1993 were:

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Business Week

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space, corporate sponsorships, subscriptions, and individual contributions isn't proving to be enough. To a crew that puts out a tabloid paper on a nine-inch Macintosh, the resources of a large metropolitan daily look pretty inviting.

Liza Featherstone

Featherstone is a research associate for CJR and a free-lance writer.

risky business? journalists and insurance

What do some insurers have against journalists? Recent cases of apparently discriminatory underwriting have reporters, some insurance regulators, and even a few underwriters wondering.

Last September Hamilton Masters, a senior producer at KHOU-TV in Houston, posted

a query on the Computer Assisted Reporting and Research List (CARR-L) electronic bulletin board after learning that a colleague had been denied insurance because he was a reporter. Masters was trying to see if other journalists had experienced similar discrimination. And, apparently, they had. Several reported insurance trouble. In three cases, four counting Masters's co-worker, journalists had sought property/casualty insurance of one kind or another, had paid their fees, signed their forms, and considered their policies finalized, only to receive notification within two months that their coverage was denied — because of their occupation. A fifth turned up in *The Salt Lake City Tribune*.

Insurers can be wary of "high profile" customers, and they sometimes put journalists in this category, along with entertainers, professional athletes, and politicians. This may figure if your last name is Cronkite or Brokaw, but what if it's Cray?

Or Brown? Or Getter?

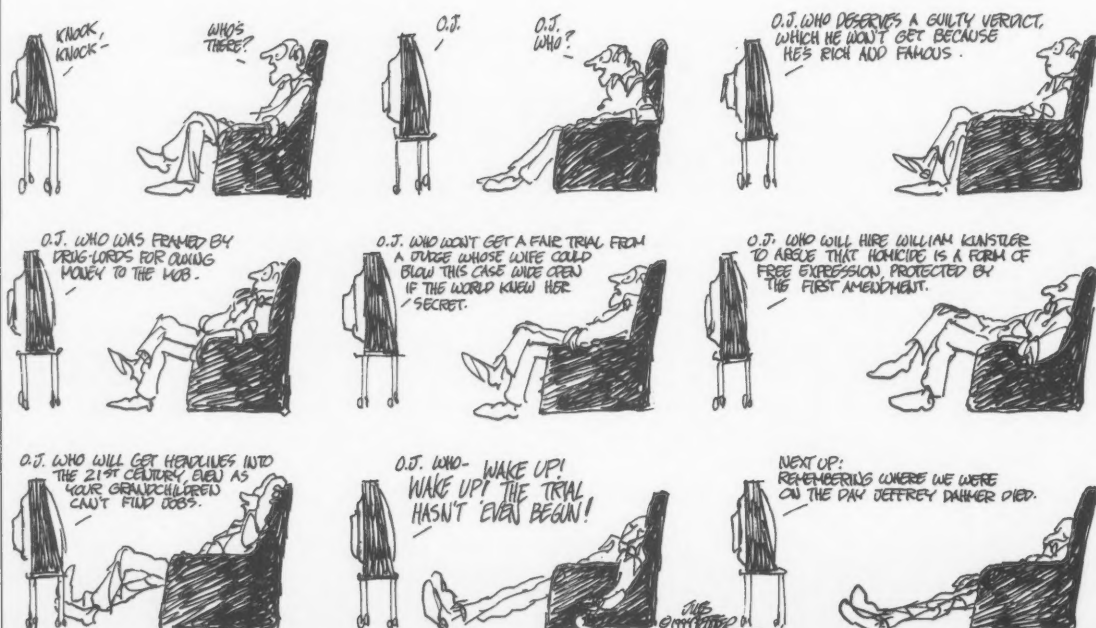
Jennifer Cray, former lifestyle editor for *The Daily Breeze* (circulation 82,000) of Torrance, California, and Marc Igler, her husband, an assistant city editor of the same paper, were denied homeowner's insurance last August by AAA Interinsurance Exchange of the Automobile Club of Southern California. Cray says that a week after signing on with AAA her agent called with questions about her husband's occupation. A week after that, AAA cancelled their coverage because of "unacceptable exposure under the Exchange's guidelines." Alan Morris, director of underwriting for AAA, explains that his company requires special approval procedures "for applicants in high profile positions with higher exposure to liability because of celebrity status." AAA, he says, considers newspaper reporters, editors, and publishers, along with professional athletes and politicians, "high profile."

Steve Brown, a television

news reporter in Buffalo, bought renter's insurance last February from Commercial Union Insurance Company, the same company that held his auto coverage. In March, an underwriter faxed Brown's agent, writing "Please let me know what type of reporter he is and where he works" because "we would not want to write a high profile occupation as this would greatly increase our liability exposure." In April, Commercial Union canceled Brown's insurance, giving as a reason "occupational liability."

John Getter, an investigative reporter for KHOU-TV in Houston, was one month into his homeowner's policy last fall when an underwriter for Security National Insurance Company canceled it after he recognized the reporter from a television feature. According to Getter, the underwriter explained to his agent that the reporter "might do a story that pisses someone off, and they may want to blow his house

O.J. WHO? by Jules Feiffer



up." A company spokesman says Security National has no policy to automatically deny journalists. Meanwhile, Mike Androvett, an investigative reporter for KXAS in Dallas, says he had a similar experience this past September, when he tried to consolidate his auto and renter's insurance with that of his fiancée.

And, in a case that didn't turn up in Masters's electronic net, Dawn House, government editor for *The Salt Lake Tribune*, encountered a problem at American States Insurance Company. A few weeks after House paid for her auto insurance, she received a call from her agent. House says he asked, "Have you ever been personally threatened or had anyone angry with you for the type of work you do?" He then informed her, she says, that American States does not cover reporters because people "blow up their cars." House was allowed to keep her coverage after the agent determined she was an editor.

The actual risk journalists pose to insurers is unclear. They do, occasionally, get sued; and in the eighteen years since the murder of *Arizona Republic* reporter Don Bolles, ten journalists have been killed in the U.S. for reasons apparently related to their work (all but one were immigrant journalists working in a language other than English, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists). Still, as one actuary said, "You need almost a million subjects before your statistics become credible, and there simply aren't that many high-profile journalists." Mark Kincaid, of the Texas Office of Public Insurance Counsel, thinks some companies may have statistical evidence about journalists but he suspects that "in some cases it is probably more of a hunch or an estimate." Occupational statistics are more readily available for worker's compensation insurance than for auto and home coverage. The Compensation Insurance Rating Board,

a Manhattan-based numbers factory that calculates risk and rates for worker's compensation coverage, places journalists in relatively low-risk categories — with salesmen and clerks.

While occupational underwriting may seem statistically tenuous and unfairly discriminatory, it is legal. Underwriter's guidelines, meanwhile, the formula by which an insurer gauges an applicant's liability and desirability, are considered quasi trade secrets. Consumers and even regulators, therefore, may be unaware of the biases operating beneath the surface. But is occupational redlining a threat or an inconvenience to journalists? All of the journalists mentioned in this article were able to find insurance. None was denied by a second company. John Getter even saved \$10 a year.

So it could be worse. And it is, perhaps, in Great Britain. Consider a recent article in *The Guardian* about U.K. underwriting standards, which states that "several insurance underwriters said journalists are a risk because of the high consumption of alcohol traditionally associated with the profession." British underwriters are either more exacting or more candid.

Chris Nolter

Nolter is an intern at CJR.

the rap on the source

Imagine the reaction of James Bernard, editor and part owner of *The Source*, when he opened the November issue of his magazine, "the journal of hip hop music, culture, and politics," to see a three-page article he had not assigned, edited, or even heard about before the magazine went to press. How did it get there? According to Bernard, David Mays, part owner and the publisher, commissioned it, rewrote it, and hired outside

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artists to illustrate it, positioning it on pages that the editorial side thought were slotted for ads.

Why did Mays do it? The article was about The Almighty RSO, a rap group that he has personally pushed, but which Bernard says he had been insisting would be treated just like any other musical group. Mays, for his part, says that Bernard had unfairly shut The Almighty RSO out of the magazine because of some kind of personal prejudice. "As ironic as it may seem," he says, "what I was doing was an attempt to correct the situation and improve our credibility."

The Almighty RSO, it seems, had been a sore point between Mays and his editorial staff for some time because members of the group had been not only demanding favorable coverage but spicing those demands with physical threats. According to Bernard, Raydog, leader of Almighty RSO, told him in June that "If [my record] don't get at least a four [rating from the magazine] I'm putting niggers in bodybags."

Such threats are taken seriously lately in the nebulous "hip hop nation" of America's urban youth, where music critics have occasionally been physically attacked. Raydog says he was not serious, and Mays says office security was not a real problem.

Imagine Mays's reaction, meanwhile, to find out that Bernard had faxed a letter demanding the publisher's "resignation" to *Source* advertisers and to media outlets — but not to Mays. Bernard eventually left the magazine, and seven staff members followed him out the door. "Mays's actions were so egregious we felt we had no other choice," says former associate editor Carter Harris.

Mays started the magazine in 1988, when he was an undergraduate at Harvard, and later moved it to New York. It grew quickly from a one-page flyer to a 100-plus-page glossy with a circulation of 125,000 and a readership said to be much higher than that.

Paul Tullis

*Tullis is associate editor of
Might magazine.*

Covering the World of the Muslims

Worn stereotypes, inaccurate references, less than informed sources — the media have had their problems covering Muslims, especially militants. Yet the stories, foreign and domestic, will not fade. The world has more than a billion Muslims and their religion, Islam, has undergone massive upheaval. In parts of the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, political Islam has become a major force, if not a revolution waiting in the wings. In the U.S., due to steady immigration from the Muslim world and the popularity of Islam among African-Americans, Muslims have stirred America's religious mix. And with the bombing of a New York skyscraper in 1993, Americans were more closely introduced to Islamic extremism's grim reality. In the interest of better coverage, here are some issues that the news media will continue to face, along with some sources for covering them.

MILITANT ISLAM One view is that militant Islam as seen in such places as Iran and Algeria is a well-organized threat to the West as well as a backward step for Muslims. The only way to deal with militant Islam, this thinking goes, is to contain it or suppress it. Two experts who generally hold this view: Daniel Pipes, historian, Middle East specialist, expert on Syria and Islam, of the Middle East Forum (215-569-9225, ext. 15), and Martin Kramer, expert on Islam and Middle East politics, associate director of the Moshe Dayan Center at Tel Aviv University, for the 1994-95 academic year at Georgetown University, Government Department (202-687-6094).

Another view is that militant Islam is far more complex than it seems, that, for example, the goals of fundamentalists vary across the Muslim world. Similarly, some argue that the West can gain more by dealing with militant Islamic groups than by isolating them. Experts with such views include: John Esposito, Director of the Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, (202-687-8375); John Voll, professor of history, expert on Islamic trends, Egypt, and the Sudan, University of New Hampshire (603-862-1764); and Graham Fuller, Rand Corporation, Washington, D.C., a former U.S. Foreign Service officer and policy analyst for the CIA, and a specialist on Islam, the Middle East, and Central Asia (202-296-5000, ext. 5301).

For expertise on the Middle East and Islam, try the Middle East Studies Association, University of Arizona (602-621-5850, or via the Internet, mesa@ccit.arizona.edu).

UNDERSTANDING ISLAM; ISLAM AND HUMAN RIGHTS; ISLAM AND WOMEN Islamic nations are often portrayed in news reports as uniformly intolerant and anti-democratic. Another view is that freedom in the Muslim world varies widely from place to place. Some contacts are: Azizah al-Hibri, an expert on Islam and women, professor of law at the University of Richmond Law School (804-289-8466); John E. Woods, professor of history, Middle East Center, University of Chicago (312-702-8343).

MUSLIM IMMIGRANTS IN NORTH AMERICA After the World Trade Center bombing, some experts on terrorism quickly suggested that Muslim immigrants are carrying their religious disputes to the U.S. Another view is that most Muslim immigrants, including militants, tend to shed their political beliefs as they adjust to life in North America. A well-informed scholar on Muslim immigrants is Yvonne Haddad, professor of Islamic history at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. She edited *Muslims of America*, 1991, Oxford University Press, and *Muslim Communities in North America*, 1994, State University of New York Press (413-545-4256). Two major Muslim groups in North America are the Islamic Society of North America, Plainfield, Indiana (317-839-815) and the Islamic Circle of North America, Jamaica, New York (718-658-1199). The Council on American-Islamic Relations, Washington, D.C., focuses on the image of Muslims in the news media (202-638-6340).

ISLAM AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICANS More people are familiar with Louis Farrakhan and his Nation of Islam than the seventeen different Muslim groups within the African-American communities, most of which, according to experts, are far larger. (Most traditional Muslims, meanwhile, do not accept the Nation of Islam as a branch of Islam.) African-Americans account for nearly half of the Muslims in the U.S.

An expert on Islam in America is Aminah McCloud, professor of Islamic Studies at DePaul University, Chicago. She is the author of *African-American Islam*, 1994, Routledge (312-362-8744). Imam W. Deen Mohammed, son of the late Elijah Mohammed, leads one African-American Islamic community that aligns itself with traditional Islam (708-862-5228). Imam Jamil Abdullah Al-Amin, formerly known as H. Rap Brown, leads another community based in Atlanta (404-758-7016).

Stephen Franklin

Franklin is a Chicago Tribune reporter who has covered the Middle East.

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The Casey Journalism Center for Children and Families offers fellowships for 30 journalists to attend a week-long conference on "Protecting the Welfare of Children," June 11-16, 1995, at the University of Maryland.

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Contact: Cathy Trost, Casey Journalism Center, College of Journalism, Univ. of Maryland, College Park, Md. 20742-7111. Phone: 301-405-2482.

The Center is part of the University of Maryland College of Journalism and is funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

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FOLLOW UP

The Age Factor

In the May/June 1991 issue, *CJR* reported on a group of veteran producers and news writers at NBC, mostly in their forties or fifties, who were complaining that they had been assigned to what they called a "Drowning Pool" — systematically underemployed by the network in an attempt to make them quit, so that the network could replace them with younger, cheaper people.

The pool is now empty. Roughly half of its members have left NBC, many taking buyouts. The rest were given new network jobs, according to Stephen Sturm, a lawyer for NABET, the National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians, the union that represents many NBC employees. Beth Comstock, vice president of news information at NBC, says the news department's policy changed under new leadership, but she did not want to discuss the reasons for the change.

But older television reporters continue to find themselves squeezed out. In recent months, a number of TV age-discrimination lawsuits have sprouted up; they are being followed by the journalistic community with considerable interest.

- Steve Powers, a former reporter for Fox's WNYW-TV in New York, filed a \$2 million age bias lawsuit in New York State Supreme Court this summer against his former employer. The sixty-year-old Powers cites published statements by Fox executives about how the station wants to seek younger reporters.

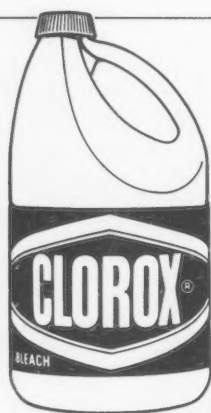
- Another veteran reporter, fifty-five-year-old Steve Davis, recently won a suit against San Francisco's KGO-TV, and the station's owner, ABC Capital Cities Inc. Davis claimed that he was forced out while the station continued to hire younger and less experienced reporters. He received \$224,419, representing past and future lost wages.

- On April 28, John Sheahan, a former CBS Beijing bureau chief, reached an out-of-court settlement with the network for an undisclosed amount. (He had been seeking \$1 million.) At the time of his dismissal, Sheahan was seventeen months shy of qualifying for a full pension and lifelong medical benefits. CBS agreed to settle the case on the same day that Court TV had been scheduled to start broadcasting live coverage of the proceedings in a federal district court.

Aileen Soper

Soper is a former *CJR* intern.

5



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Darts & Laurels

◆ **LAUREL** to *The Wall Street Journal* and staff reporter Alix M. Freedman, for a matchless story on smokeless tobacco — and how malignant strategies in its manufacture and marketing have made it the only product of the dangerous weed whose use is growing, particularly among the young. Drawing on internal memorandums, financial records, and federal documents, as well as on interviews with former industry employees, health officials, and juveniles hooked on the stuff, Freedman's 4,000-word page-one leader (October 26) alleged, among other things, that (1) while U.S. Tobacco, which controls 84 percent of the \$1.6 billion snuff and chewing market, may be technically correct in denying that it manipulates the levels of nicotine in smokeless tobacco to make it more addictive, it in fact achieves that profitable result by varying *other* chemicals — chemicals that regulate the amount of nicotine released in a user's mouth; and that (2) U.S. Tobacco designs its products to deliver four different levels of nicotine, easing users along from the candy-flavored "kindergarten" brands to, at the graduate level, the bestselling, unflavored Copenhagen, described by one government scientist as "the heroin of smokeless tobacco." Although last spring's congressional hearings failed to establish that tobacco companies manipulate the levels of nicotine, those hearings focused primarily on cigarettes and not on smokeless products; the establishment of such manipulation could provide the FDA with a basis on which to regulate tobacco as a drug.

◆ **DART** to KABC-TV, Los Angeles, and KBHK-TV, San Francisco, for snuffing out a perfectly legitimate antismoking commercial when a tobacco-company chief started breathing fire. Sponsored by the California Department of Health Services and relying on news footage of congressional hearings at which c.e.o.s of American Tobacco, Philip Morris, Brown & Williamson, and R.J. Reynolds testified under oath that they do not believe nicotine to be addictive, the commercial — which challenged the industry's credibility in denying the dangers of secondhand smoke — apparently gave Reynolds's James W. Johnston such jitters that his lawyers demanded it be withdrawn under the strongly implied threat of a libel suit. In a particularly pungent response, health department director S. Kimberly Belshé rejected the "attempt to coerce individual stations to remove these commercials from the air," characterizing "this strong-arm tactic to subvert the intent of the voter-approved media

campaign" as "an objectionable act of desperation." Her principled firmness notwithstanding, both KABC and KBHK gave in and dropped the ad. At least nineteen other stations in the state, including Fox's KTVU in Oakland, did not; since then, the threat of legal action seems to have drifted away, like a wisp of smoke.

◆ **LAUREL** to *Consumer Reports*, for cutting through the smokescreen of industry p.r. In its May report on the unsettling proliferation of so-called citizen or consumer alliances, coalitions, and councils that appear to be working for the public interest but that are in fact deceptively named groups pushing the agendas of, among others, automobile, oil, and pharmaceutical companies, *CR* showed how the tobacco industry "plays the public-interest pretender game" best of all, organizing taxpayer's groups and restaurant associations to oppose tobacco taxes and bans on smoking in public places. As a case in point, the article focused on seemingly objective (but unquantifiably anecdotal) surveys, sponsored by the likes of the (tobacco-seeded) "Beverly Hills Restaurant Association," "California Business and Restaurant Alliance," and "Restaurants for a Sensible Voluntary Policy," which claimed to prove that restaurants in California communities lose an average of 30 percent of their revenues after smoking bans go into effect. *CR* noted that this is a mythical statistic that continues to smolder in news accounts (*Time*, the *Los Angeles Times*) as well as in restaurant industry publications despite the fact that more scientifically grounded studies, based on actual receipts, have found no significant drop at all — and that, indeed, in some thirteen communities in the state, restaurant revenues actually rose.

◆ **DART** to Observer Group Newspapers, publisher of three African-American papers in southern California, for selling its brothers and sisters down the tobacco-country river. While just about every other news organization was alerting the public to the true intent of Proposition 188 — a November ballot initiative that appeared to support "statewide smoking restrictions" but that in fact had been organized by Philip Morris to reduce antismoking laws already in effect — the Observer weeklies regularly carried full-page ads supporting the proposition, along with articles promoting the Philip Morris (and only the Philip Morris) point of view — for example, that voting against 188 would be "disastrous for minority business." As one of the few

news outlets in the state to have editorialized in favor of the (ultimately defeated) proposition, the Observer group seemed unconcerned that, with cigarette smoking in such wide decline, the African-American community in America, together with third-world communities abroad, represents nothing less than the tobacco industry's great black hope.

◆ **DART** to the schoolchildren's newspaper *Weekly Reader*, for demonstrating that education may be hazardous to your health. Its October 14 article, "Do Cigarettes Have a Future?" smelled like secondhand smoke from the industry's recently fired-up p.r. campaign for so-called smoker's rights, with a four-color cover photo of out-of-work tobacco farmers at a Washington demonstration for "Freedom of Choice"; with a text that focused on the "unfairness" of antismoking laws (subhead: THE FIGHT FOR RIGHTS) as well as on the economic impact of those laws (subhead: BAD FOR BUSINESS); and with a subliminal appeal to its hundreds of thousands of young captive readers to join the pack (black-and-white inside photo of cool-looking kid being "forced by antismoking laws . . . to light up outdoors," as he stands in the shadow of a Joe Camel billboard that reads IT PAYS TO BE SMOOTH). As fuming health activists, unappeased by the publication's more responsible insert poster for teachers or by its previous pieces on the relation of smoking and health, were swift to point out, *Weekly Reader* is owned by K-III Communications, a unit of Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Company, which is the controlling shareholder in RJR Nabisco, the nation's largest maker of cigarettes (including Camels). Among K-III's other holdings, added the *Chicago Tribune* in an October 17 editorial, are *Seventeen* magazine, the Channel One school satellite network, and various school newspapers and book clubs; it is also the largest distributor of high-school video and film strips. "Sophistication does not require us to turn a blind eye to such outrageous breaches of decency as the *Weekly Reader's*," asserted the *Trib*. "In fact, it requires us to be far more observant in the future."

◆ **LAUREL** to *The New England Journal of Medicine*, for providing some much-needed comic relief. When seven-year-old Sammy Blum wrote a letter to the editor wondering why some of his Marvel Masterpiece trading cards showed "villains and heros" smoking, editor Jerome P. Kassirer didn't laugh, or even smile. Instead, he held on to Sammy's letter while pressing the Marvel Entertainment Group — "the leading publisher of comic books in North America," which had once boasted in *Advertising Age* that its "spokespeople will never smoke, drink, take drugs . . . or do anything to embarrass a client" — for a response. The *Journal's* May issue told the tale: "Sammy's question . . . has raised our awareness that

these images may be subject to misinterpretation by young card enthusiasts," wrote Marvel president Terry Stewart. "Hence, we have decided to omit smoking materials from all future Marvel trading cards."

◆ **DART** to *The Dallas Morning News*, for its phlegmatic treatment of the filthier aspects of the Kleenex company's business. The paper pays plenty of attention to financial news of locally based Kimberly Clark, which it consistently identifies as the giant maker of such godliness-granting products as diapers, tissues, and paper towels, but it wipes away any mention of the company's work in processing tobacco. Only those *Morning News* readers who also subscribe to the alternative weekly *Dallas Observer* would know, for example, of a unique lawsuit filed this fall against the company for medical expenses incurred from smoking-related illnesses — a lawsuit based on a series of Kimberly Clark ads in tobacco trade journals promoting the use of its tobacco sheets. "Nicotine levels are becoming a growing concern of designers of modern cigarettes," the *Observer* quoted one such ad as claiming under the banner headline MORE OR LESS. "The Kimberly Clark tobacco reconstitution process used by [French subsidiary] LTR Industries permits adjustments of nicotine to your exact requirements . . . Get more tobacco from all your tobacco."

◆ **DART** to CBS and *America Tonight*, for failing to filter out an impure source. In a flagrant attempt to stamp out the Clinton administration's "politically correct" proposal to help defray the cost of health-care reform by increasing taxes on cigarettes, the network newsmagazine presented ("before you make up your mind") an "undercover investigation" of the experience in Canada, where a similar policy had been in effect since 1982. Guided by one Rod Stamler, identified as a "former top officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police" who was also "investigating" the issue, reporter Bob McKeown found only bad news: an increase in smoking, no increase in government revenues, and a billion-dollar smuggling industry marked by criminal gangs, organized crime, illicit money, and guns — "exactly what took place in the bad old days of Prohibition," voiceovers observed against a background of 1920s footage of gangland wars, "except it's cigarettes instead of booze." After yet another ominous reminder that raising taxes on cigarettes is "still an important part of the Clinton plan," the segment concluded, "Don't do it. . . . Don't even consider it." Viewers trying to "make up their minds" might have benefited from knowing that — as the newsletter *Extra!* later pointed out — the former Mountie's then-employer was a Canadian consulting firm researching the smuggling issue for Imperial Tobacco and the Canadian Tobacco Manufacturers Council and that, according to government and industry reports, between

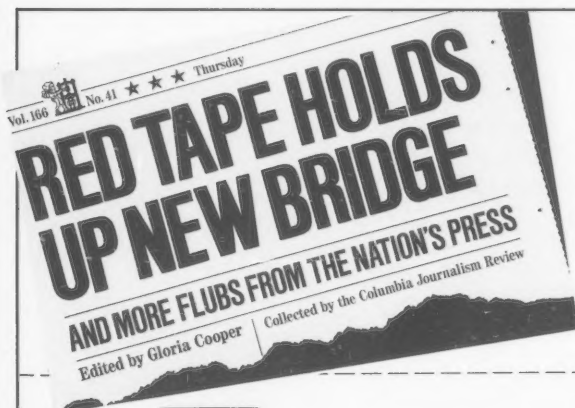
1982 and 1992 Canadian cigarette tax revenues went considerably up; cigarette consumption, down.

◆ **DART** to *The New York Times*, for tobacco-stained journalism. Lighting up the paper's Sunday, October 9, Styles section was a tasteful plug for the Fashion Designers of America's campaign to mark October as National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, accompanied by seven candid photos of Ralph Lauren employees out and about in campaign T-shirts designed by their boss. For some readers, however, the "good-cause" message quickly turned to ashes when they noticed that several of the models the *Times* chose to feature were also sporting cigarettes. Two Sundays later, on October 23, the *Times's* very same Styles section indulged in a 95-column-inch piece on the rediscovered "glamour in social smoking." What lip service the piece gave to the less glamorous aspects of the habit was undercut by three enormous photographs of young men and women taking a drag; by the sidebar on Philip Morris's new campaign for "tolerance," complete with a three-by-five-inch reproduction of that campaign's "accommodation" symbol; and by the overall tone of the piece, summed up in the final, unambiguous quote: "It just seems cool." Then, on December 1, the *Times* chose to illustrate a Consumer's World article on the latest developments in cordless phones with a photograph of a man using such a phone outdoors while smoking a cigarette. "Anthony Roberts of Jersey City can't smoke at home," ran the uncalled-for caption, "so he

goes outside and phones, too." (Even the *Times's* Sunday magazine crossword puzzle of November 6 seemed to be puffing to keep up. 43 Down: "Alternative to Viceroy's." Answer: "S-A-L-E-M-S.")

◆ **LAUREL** to *The New York Times* and cultural correspondent Paul Goldberger, for illuminating the link between art and life. In a page-one October 5 story, Goldberger revealed that the many cultural institutions in New York City that over the years have been the lucky beneficiaries of Philip Morris's artful largess were currently being pressured by their patron to support its lobbying campaign against the city's proposed new antismoking bill. So addicted to cigarette money are these museums, music academies, and dance companies, the *Times's* report made clear, that officials and board members of the various organizations were afraid to speak on the record about Philip Morris's implied threat to remove itself — and its funding — from New York if the bill should pass; what's more, it turned out, organizations were indeed following the company's suggestion that they urge the city council to keep the cigarette maker happy. On November 30, the paper reported that city council members had apparently got the message: portions of the bill were being reworked to make them considerably milder. Thus has an age-old adage acquired new and noxious meaning: *ars longa, vita brevis*.

This column is compiled and written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.



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Yakety-YAK

The Lost Art of Interviewing

by Tom Rosenstiel

It didn't quite make sense, but the moment was curiously riveting. The TV program was *American Journal* and "special correspondent" Roger Clinton, the president's brother, was interviewing Alan Dershowitz, the Harvard law professor and O.J. Simpson lawyer, about fissures in Simpson's defense team.

Click. On another channel, on *Last Call*, a new talk show, a group of people sitting in a living room were doing a half-comic interview with special guest Jimmy Breslin, up on a screen from the streets of New York.

Click. On another spot on the dial, TV host Charlie Rose was interviewing husband-and-wife political celebrities James Carville and Mary Matalin about their new book. Matalin's own talk show — *Click* — was simultaneously being shown on another channel.

If you don't count the Socratic dialogues, the interview first appeared in a

treatise in the Middle Ages as a method of presenting religious ideas, worked its way into American journalism around 1850, and reached its peak in the 1950s and 1960s in *The Paris Review*, *The New Yorker*, and *Playboy*, which used the form to explore the personalities of literary, social, and political celebrities. But at no time has the interview seemed more popular than today.

In network television, it even has a new name, "the Get." Nabbing the right Get — the interview with the right member of O.J.'s family or the right celebrity in crisis — can make a show for months. Interviews form part of the backbone of the supposedly "new media" of talk radio and the basis, aside from reruns, of much that permeates cable TV. It is the one part of old news reporting that is certain to survive in cyberspace. We are living in The Age of Interview, a carnival of chat, chatter, conversation, confession, spin, sharing, and selling. But a closer look suggests that in the era of "live," of fifty-seven channels, more turns out to be less. Technology, the accelerating pace of news, the growing sophistication of

sources, the increasing competition among news outlets — all conspire to make many interviews more performance art than newsgathering, often with the interviewee rather than the interviewer in control. "The state of the interview today is not good," says Robert Scheer, the Los Angeles-based writer, one of the few long-form practitioners of the art.

The interview's popularity follows in part because the form is cheap and adaptable and is always focused on people. That makes it ideally suited to electronic delivery. It also tends to elevate exuberant personalities — Montel and Rolanda, Ricki and Maury, Geraldo and Sally Jessy — people whose shows are often tasteless and, to the extent that the shows coarsen society, probably even dangerous. Yet it is fairer and more useful to look at the state of the interview in more serious journalistic settings.

Newspaper and newsmagazine interviews today are increasingly conducted over the phone, with reporters assembling stories as much as reporting them, combining elements from electronic

Tom Rosenstiel is a national correspondent for the Los Angeles Times and author of Strange Bedfellows: How Television and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992.

transcripts, data bases, and television. A growing number of major events, reporters acknowledge, are covered without going to the scene. The stories are often more complete in the sense of combining more elements. But they lack the advantage of serendipity or the authenticity of having been there.

One reason for this is the increasingly fleeting nature of what is defined as news. "Most reporters aren't interested in finding out what happened," says William Greider, the Washington author and journalist who has become famous for penetrating forgotten institutions and for probing into the deeper meaning of political trends. "Most journalists are interested in finding out about news, which is another commodity, one interested in what's the angle today, or this week, or tomorrow."

In the culture of Washington journalism in particular, in which print journalists pressed by faster and faster news cycles increasingly emphasize analysis rather than original reporting, the purpose of many interviews is often not to gather information but to gather comment about it. "They want to plug a hole in their story or give their pieces a voice to make their point," Greider says.

With most politicians, moreover, and with others schooled in the art of communicating, the first fifteen or twenty minutes of any interview is a prepared message. Getting beyond the boilerplate requires special creativity, and more importantly, time.

At the *Los Angeles Times*, writer Barry Bearak has become famous for getting close to society's down and out. He lives in homeless shelters, uncovers the world of subway cheaters or people who live under freeway overpasses. Bearak finds that even these people go into "sound bite mode" the first time he talks to them. "What is obvious to me is just how superficial your first go-round is with anyone — a crack dealer or a politician," he says. "I think interviewing is not so much a lost skill as it is that

newspapers need to give their people more time."

For his famous 1976 interview with Jimmy Carter in *Playboy*, in which the future president acknowledged having lust in his heart for women and musing over how God might react to that, Robert Scheer interviewed him in depth on five separate occasions over three months. Alex Haley, another former *Playboy* interviewer, used to go to his subjects' hometowns and interview the people who knew them as children before he ever met them face to face. For one thing, this demonstrated to suspicious and oft-interviewed people that he was serious. Before *Playboy* writer Eric Norden interviewed the former Nazi minister Albert Speer, he

spent six weeks studying the subject. Their interview lasted ten days and nights and left both at the brink of exhaustion. Mike Wallace of *60 Minutes* once spent fifty-five hours in preliminary talks with H.R. Haldeman before going on camera (in the notorious paid-for interview).

Other fine reporters develop their own interview techniques. In his reporting days, Gene Roberts, now managing editor of *The New York Times*, had a knack for using silence to get people to reveal themselves, to fill the uncomfortable voids. Les Whitten, the former investigative reporter for *The Washington Post* and *Jack Anderson's Washington Merry-go-Round*, was a master of using the bluff, persuading subjects that he had more evidence about their misdeeds than he actually did. Bob Woodward of *The Washington Post* is one of the best at winning his subjects' trust, by wooing them gently over a long period of time and persuading them he will honor promises of what is on and what is off the record. Jack Nelson, Washington bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*, says such trust comes with a track record, as reporters establish over the years that they are fair and balanced.

Whatever the technique, a common

ingredient of the superb interview is a knowledge of the subject matter so thorough that it creates a kind of intimacy between journalist and interviewee. Consider Mike Wallace exposing the brutal deceptions of the Shah of Iran in 1976.

Wallace: Well, they talk about psychological and physical torture.

Shah of Iran: Physical, I don't believe.

Wallace: I talked —

Shah: Not any more. Maybe in the old days. Maybe.

Wallace: I talked just today to a man, whom I believe, who told about torture.

Shah: How many years ago?

Wallace: Within — I want to be very careful. Not yesterday.

Shah: Ah, well, maybe. I don't know.

Wallace: The word has gone out to stop it?

Shah: To stop what?

Wallace: Torture.

Shah: But a long time ago, yes.

Wallace: How long ago?

Shah: Well, I won't tell you, as you don't tell me.

Or note how Wallace provokes entertainer Barbra Streisand into revealing herself in a 1991 interview, as her movie *The Prince of Tides* was opening.

Wallace: You know what your mother told me about her relationship with you?

Streisand: What? What? What?

Wallace: She says you haven't "got time to be close to anyone," quote, and . . .

Streisand: She said "to anyone," or did she say to her?

Wallace: To anyone. That's your own ma. And even now, Mom's judgment stings.

Streisand: You like this that forty million people have to see me, like, do this?

Wallace: Barbra, what am I going to do? "And then I wrote . . .," "And then my next song was . . .?"

Streisand: No.

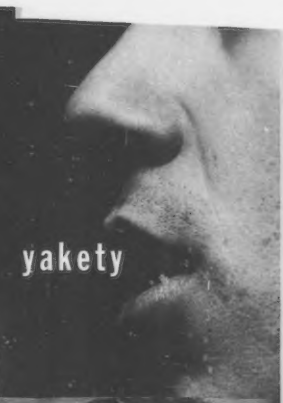
Wallace: That's what the picture's about. That's what *Prince of Tides* is all about.

Streisand: Here's the truth, OK? — that

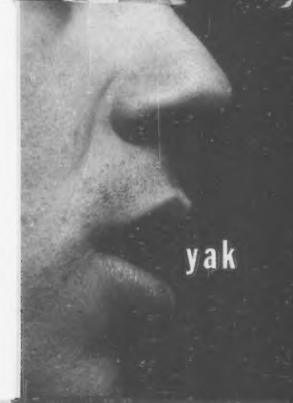
Some of America's best-known interviewers, left to right, and from the top row down: William Greider, Barbara Walters, Charlie Rose, Connie Chung, Bob Woodward, Ted Koppel, Diane Sawyer, Dan Rather, Mike Wallace, and Larry King

Getting beyond
the boilerplate
requires special
creativity and,
more importantly,
time

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: TOM TAYLOR; FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: BRUCE HARREL/GAMMA LIAISON, KELLY JORDAN/SYGMA, STEVE ALLEN/GAMMA LIAISON, NINA BERMAN/SIPA WALKER/GAMMA LIAISON, TRIPPET/SIPA PRESS, STEVE ALLEN/GAMMA LIAISON, GAMMA LIAISON, JEFFREY MARKOWITZ/SYGMA



yakety



yak



yakety-yak



yakety-yak



I wanted to make a very strong point in the movie about grieving and about crying. If you notice, I do it through — obviously, it's the story of a man's catharsis, a man's getting to the point where he can feel again.

Importantly, both of these interviews were on tape. They encompassed several sessions that were then edited together into as coherent and meaningful a profile as the *60 Minutes* team could produce.

The kind of access, meanwhile, that these examples represent has become more difficult to gain today, journalists acknowledge, particularly with public figures. The main reason is related to supply and demand. The proliferation of media outlets has ceded power to those being sought after, not to the interviewers. "There is so much competition that [interview subjects] can pick and choose and exercise enormous control," says Scheer. And often they are not picking print. Some of the best interviewing in print today tends to be with less famous people, whose stories are unknown.

Such competition is having an even more pronounced effect on TV. During his 1992 presidential campaign, Ross Perot talked plainly about how he preferred live television over taped, because it offered him more control. And Perot managed to exercise a lot of choice in the matter. "Live interviews, like live press conferences," says Mike Wallace, "are the easiest thing for a politician to control." The live interview, meanwhile, has become the dominant form of discourse in the media.

Live is nothing new, of course. It was the norm for interviews in the 1950s, on shows like *Nightbeat* with Mike Wallace. The *Today* show began using satellites to do live interviews at news events in the mid-1970s. But it became omnipresent in the 1980s, as the spread of portable electronic newsgathering equipment allowed local and national anchors to interview people from anywhere. Ted Koppel began using the live interview format on *Nightline* in 1980. Soon, interviews began popping up in the middle of the evening news shows and every local outlet in the country began going live to the fire or the fallen

tree, and to a live interview with the firefighter, witness, or police officer on the scene. Yet even with subjects at the highest level, the form has profound limitations.

"Mr. Vice President, thank you for being with us tonight," Dan Rather began on that January night in 1988. "Donald Gregg still serves as your trusted adviser. He was deeply involved in running arms to the Contras and he didn't inform you. When President Reagan's trusted adviser Admiral Poindexter failed to inform him, the president fired him. Why is Mr. Gregg still inside the White House, still a trusted adviser?"

Rather's attempt to tangle with George Bush live on the *CBS Evening News* tested and exposed more clearly than any previous interview the constraints of live interviewing in the modern era. He had a simple aim: to pin down Bush on how much the then vice president knew about the Iran-Contra affair. And Rather used nine of his twenty-two minutes of the newscast to try, extraordinarily long by TV standards. Bush countered by repeatedly questioning the questions, accusing Rather of ambushing him, and finally attacking Rather for once walking off the set. The incident helped reinvigorate Bush's campaign, and may have damaged Rather. As a newsgathering event, it was a failure.

Rather was operating on the outmoded assumption that the live TV interview can be a *real* interview, a process by which a reporter can truly explore his subject to gather information. Nowadays, most live interviews, instead, are a kind of ceremonial ritual that only resemble the real thing, with strict boundaries beyond which the journalist cannot trespass, inadequate time to go beyond the carefully prepared, and a tacit conspiracy between interviewer and interviewee that this be good TV.

"My husband calls live interviews performance masquerading as conversation," says ABC's Diane Sawyer, whose husband is the film director Mike Nichols.

Indeed, on network television, where the level of production quality tends to be higher, most interviews are preceded by lengthy "pre-interviews," in which producers find out what the interviewee

will say and outline what he will be asked. Such predigestion is considered essential if the interview is to pass as adequate television. This process of "casting" interviews, often in search of conflict or other television values, takes place even on such hallowed ground as *The MacNeil/Lehrer NewsHour*.

The mythology of television as a kind of psychic "X-ray" whose "piercing stare" would expose the liars and charlatans and drive them from public life, the kind of imagery that inspired the CBS unblinking-eye logo, has long faded away. Live may provide a sense of spontaneity, but not the electricity of revelation.

Perhaps that is why two of the most successful live interview programs on television today are those hosted by Charlie Rose and Larry King. Neither asks tough questions. Rather, they elicit something else from their subjects, interesting chat perhaps, or a sense of what someone is like, "the cut of a person's gib," as ABC's Jeff Greenfield once put it. Rose, however, is particularly good at gently guiding an interviewee back to a certain point by rephrasing the point as Rose understood it. "Are you saying . . ." or "Do you mean to say . . ." Rose asks, over and over, as with his November 3 interview with Charles Murray, co-author of *The Bell Curve*. "I'm trying to make sure we understand what the book is about . . . are you saying that genes determine intelligence?"

Even Ted Koppel, perhaps the strongest interviewer in a hard-news setting, acknowledges that there are strict limits on what the live interviewer can accomplish, although he thinks there are ways to operate within them. Koppel says that in any TV interview, there is a natural affinity between the viewer and the interviewer. "The most fundamental rule is to keep the viewer identifying with you," he says, by knowing what the viewer might be thinking and moving along those lines. "You can lose that identification easily by losing control of the interview, or by being too aggressive or rude, or by not asking the right type of questions."

To maintain this subtle relationship, Koppel thinks it is important to let the person being interviewed have his or her say on the first question or two. Then at a

certain point, if a person is going on too long or avoiding the question, and "everyone at home gets it," the interviewer has license from the viewer to become more aggressive. In Koppel's mind, it is as if an alarm has gone off, and the viewer is saying, "Ted, get in there."

If the subject continues to be evasive, however, "the best you can do is leave the audience with the impression that this person just doesn't want to answer the question." You can ask a question two or three times, "to sort of underscore it, underline it," Koppel says, but imagining that you can wring the truth out of somebody is unrealistic.

Quality live interviewing, Koppel says, requires two elements that most such interviews lack: adequate time and an ability on the part of the interviewer to edit the interview in his or her mind as it is occurring. "The essence of journalism is editing," he says. "And editing while you are on the air is extremely tough. It means sifting out the extraneous from the relevant, the new from the old" — in your head, while listening to the person talking, and thinking of the next question.

The taped interview, of course, offers the opportunity to edit in comparative leisure. On the prime time magazine shows, where most such interviews appear today, people have the time and resources and the freedom to veer away from the flow of news to do the kind of thorough preparation that makes for great interviews.

On the magazine shows, too, there is time to provide context, to check facts, to do multiple interviews — to do meaningful, if not penetrating, interviews. So, what are they doing?

It is premier week for NBC's *Dateline*, which is stripped across three nights of prime time, and the show is featuring three nights of an interview with O.J. Simpson's children by his first marriage. (His daughter professes that she knows her father cannot be guilty, and both repeatedly decline to discuss certain topics that Katie Couric alludes to.) ABC, meanwhile, is giving a three-part interview to Nicole Brown Simpson's family on *PrimeTime Live*, and CBS has O.J.'s mother and sister on *Eye to Eye with Connie Chung*.

The competition between media,

along with the growing sophistication of those who are interviewed, has markedly changed how these taped television interviews are conducted and altered what ends up on the air.

By the mid-1980s, Mike Wallace says, the confrontational style for which he made his name on *60 Minutes* no longer proved useful. "It used to work for me years ago because it was unexpected. We did get some truth-telling." But once the *60 Minutes* reputation became better known, he says, "it wore off."

Also, he says, many of those interviewed these days, even private citizens without media experience, have lawyers handling contracts and TV consultants coaching them on what questions will be asked. Wallace says that Don Tyson, the chicken producer from Arkansas, was fully prepared that way. Tonya Harding had one group of lawyers to handle her case and another set of lawyers to handle her negotiations with the media.

The techniques that movie studios developed playing hardball in selling their movie stars for interviews to the network morning shows in the 1980s, playing shows off against each other, have been picked up by people involved in news stories. Lawyers for Michael Fay, the American youth caned in Singapore, played the different magazine shows successfully enough to secure promises of forty minutes across two nights on *NBC Dateline*. In the case of one network, whose name I have agreed to withhold as a condition of learning this information, a prominent person involved in a recent crime case even secured the right to approve the script of the interview about her to ensure that the tone was positive.

"All of these people have representation," says one network senior producer. "These are not so much interviews any more as deals."

Even a large percentage of the softer feature interviews done these days are a form of deal making, keyed to a celebrity's newest book or movie or album.

Consider *PrimeTime Live*'s profile interview recently with comedian Tim Allen, or *Dateline*'s with Dolly Parton or Audrey Meadows — all celebrities with books just out.

When such celebrities or heavyweight authors are hot, their agents are in a position to exert some leverage over the shape of the interview. "I would never ask that [an interview] not be aggressive. What I'd do is ask what the tone of the interview is likely to be. That's different," says Cathy Saypol, who runs her own public relations firm and has represented books from Oliver North's *Under Fire* to Jane Mayer and Jill Abramson's recently published *Strange Justice*, about

Clarence Thomas. "I might say, 'Is the interview going to be aggressive? Is it going to be a puff piece? Is it going to get into this or that?' They might say, 'Our guy really wants to get into this,' or, 'Oh, no, our audience is interested in softer material,' or whatever. Then, you have the option to appear or not to appear."

Saypol says she might request that an interview run a certain

length, that certain areas of inquiry be off limits, that certain areas of inquiry be included in an interview, and so forth. "We can ask, we can suggest, we can do all of that. The final word is in the hands of the journalists," she says. "You try to get the best possible coverage for your client."

Journalism's most enduring form is suffering the same phenomenon that has affected reporting of politics and government. In much the same way that politicians and interest groups came to understand how the press operates better than the press understands itself, lawyers and consultants and spin artists are mastering the grammar of journalism and exploiting the competition between journalists to use the press to their advantage.

The interview is everywhere, but more and more, it seems to go nowhere. ♦

"All
[interview subjects]
have
representation.
These are not so
much interviews any
more as deals"

This is the story of the vested interest that hired the firm that fronted the study that skewed the numbers that spread through the press and finished off a vital piece of **health** **care reform** --- by Trudy Lieberman

Late last summer in the waning days of the great health care debate, the well-known actuarial firm of Milliman & Robertson released a study asserting that 500,000 New Yorkers had lost their health insurance when a law mandating a practice known as community rating took effect in April 1993. The study also warned that "the additional rate increases needed as a result of what has happened in New York will almost certainly mean additional uninsureds and still higher costs" — red flags to anyone looking at New York as a model for reform.

Trudy Lieberman is a contributing editor of CJR. She is a senior editor at Consumer Reports. This article reflects her conclusions, not those of Consumer Reports.

Those findings, released by a respected and presumably unbiased and independent source, quickly swept through the media, seeped into the public dialogue, and were anointed as conventional wisdom. Yet the 500,000 figure was the result of an actuarial sleight of hand and not an accurate representation of what really happened. Furthermore, the study that spawned that number was backed by insurance and other interests that had much to gain from disparaging the New York reforms. That crucial detail was missing from the many stories that blithely passed along the notion that community rating in New York had been a failure (see box on page 30).

Aided and abetted by unquestioning press coverage, the study helped kill insurance market reform, the minimalist fallback position that almost everyone believed would ultimately pass.

Even the most sophisticated reporters ran with the study's findings. Edwin Chen, no stranger to the health reform debate, reported in the *Los Angeles Times* on August 27, "In less than a year, the number of uninsured in New York grew by 500,000 — predominantly the young and healthy — while rates went up by as much as 170 percent." The next day *The New York Times* noted that New York's experience with community rating was "everyone's favorite example of bad incrementalism. . . . Albany's decision . . . led to half a million people dropping their insurance." This story was written by Adam Clymer, a reporter also familiar with the issues. The *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* reported that "rates went up and 500,000 of the 2.8 million people affected dropped their coverage."

The conclusion that New York's reforms were a failure also traveled through the broadcast media. On CNN's *Capital Gang*, commentator Mark Shields asserted, "Based upon the New York experience, if they just try to do insurance reform such as portability and pre-existing condition elimination, it's a disaster. It's going to be a disaster." Democratic political consultant Robert Shrum, a guest on the show, then asked, "More people are uncovered?" "That's right," Shields replied. "It's the experience of New York. It really is." On the *MacNeill/Lehrer NewsHour* Rep. Dick Army, a Texas Republican known for his support of minimal market-oriented reform, stated, "New York State passed some insurance reform, results in 500 people — 500 million people dropping their insurance," a preposterous statement that went unchallenged by the *NewsHour*'s Margaret Warner, who not only missed the opportunity to call Army on his misstatement but to pin him down about the source of the number. CNN's *Crossfire* weighed in with the same points on three different programs.

My own organization, Consumers Union, cited the study and the 500,000 uninsured in press materials sent to members of Congress and the media to argue against incremental reform. (The report was not mentioned in *Consumer Reports*.)

A close look at the study reveals that it was nothing more than paid propaganda that furthered the political agenda of its sponsors. Although it was released under the name of Milliman & Robertson, giving the study the stamp of objectivity and respectability, it was actually the work of two Milliman & Robertson actuaries, Mark Litow and Drew Davidoff. In a carefully worded hedge, the report noted that the work represented the "personal opinions" of the authors and "not those of Milliman & Robertson Inc."

Litow, it turns out, is a vice president of the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, a trade association of small and medium-size insurers who support only the barest market-oriented reforms. Those do not include community rating, since it would effectively put an end to the pricing and marketing strategies pursued by some of the group's members. Litow also serves on the group's technical committee and is a co-author of one of its publications, "Mandatory Community Rating: The Most Dangerous Cure for Health Care Woes." In late August, the council helped publicize the Milliman & Robertson report and its damaging statistic in a press release, noting that "this study is the first independent look at the consequences of the 'guaranteed issue' and 'community rating' provisions that were passed by New York's legislature in 1992."

Five Milliman & Robertson partners, including Litow, are associate members of the council, and one of the council's full-fledged members, Golden Rule Insurance Company, one of the firms with the most to lose from a community rating system like New York's, is a chief sponsor of the study. In fact, the 500,000 figure apparently made its first public appearance in testimony given by Golden Rule's president, John Whelan, before a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee some two weeks before the Milliman & Robertson report became public on August 18. Whelan was less than candid about the origin of the statistic, simply telling members of Congress: "To date, we understand that more than 500,000 New Yorkers have given up their health insurance protection."

By the same token, Milliman & Robertson didn't reveal the names of Golden Rule and the other lead sponsor, the National Association for the Self-Employed, for nearly two months after the report first surfaced and then only after a strong letter of protest from the New York State Insurance Department. To date, the firm still hasn't released all the sponsors' names. Milliman & Robertson chairman Daniel McCarthy says only that "the total number of sponsors was fewer than ten. I don't know them all," a puzzling remark in light of the Code of Professional Conduct adopted by the American Academy of Actuaries. Precept 6 says "an actuary shall, in communicating professional findings, identify the client or employer for which such findings are made and in what capacity the actuary serves."

The two known sponsors had more than a passing interest in a study that trashed community rating. Golden Rule, a small carrier based in Indianapolis, has carved a profitable niche for itself by refusing to insure sick people. The company is known as a "cherry picker," meaning that it sets strict health requirements for potential policyholders to meet before it will insure them. Although Golden Rule is not licensed to sell policies in New York, federal legislation or other state laws requiring strict community rating would destroy its marketing strategy.

The other lead sponsor, the National Association for the Self-Employed, a trade group with 300,000 members, most of whom employ five or fewer people, opposed the New York reforms. The association endorses group health insurance for its members. Underwriters of this insurance are some of the same companies that belong to the Council for Affordable Health Insurance. In fact, the association had sought an exemption from the law in the belief that its members are healthy or employ mostly healthy workers, and might have to pay more under community rating.

As for the central finding — that 500,000 people lost coverage — that figure was derived from an "apples and oranges" comparison. The actuaries used 1992 Current Population Reports from the Bureau of the Census as the basis for their estimates of the number of people insured before reform — the "apples" — and actual counts of policies in force, provided by insurance companies, to compute the number insured afterward — the "oranges." The census bureau numbers represent not only people covered by individual policies but also those who have purchased policies privately through groups unrelated to their employers or unions, say, for instance,

Community rating, a thorny issue in the national health care debate, is a method for setting health insurance rates so that older or sicker people who often have high medical bills pay the same rates as younger, healthier people who don't. Risk sharing among different population groups is integral to every other nation's health insurance schemes and makes universal coverage possible in those countries. Community rating, commonly used by Blue Cross organizations, once the country's major health insurers, used to be part and parcel of the U.S. health insurance system as well. Large risk pools in various parts of the country made it possible for large numbers of people to get reasonably priced coverage regardless of their health status.

But beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, commercial insurers discovered that by offering cut-rate premiums to healthy individuals and to small employers with healthy workers, they could increase their market share and save employers some money. If the healthy people got sick, carriers jacked up the rates, often making coverage unaffordable. This practice was a win-win proposition except for one troublesome point — older or sicker people either lost their health insurance or paid exorbitant rates, and carriers that dared to insure them often got stuck with a disproportionate share of so-called bad risks — an imbalance the landmark New York legislation tried to correct.

Since it was the first reform of this kind, it was being watched as a possible remedy for the national health insurance crisis. The New York legislature attempted to level the playing field by requiring all insurers to follow the same rules and widening the insurance choices available to residents. (New York also requires insurers selling in the individual and small-group market to offer a policy to anyone no matter how sick.) New York did not mandate universal coverage or community rating for large employers — further steps that would have brought about more complete reform, but would have met strong opposition from employers and insurance companies that profit from current arrangements.

through professional or religious organizations. Furthermore, the census data count as insured anyone who was covered during the past year. Policy counts, on the other hand, represent only those who purchased insurance on their own, not through any group. Unlike the census data, policy counts take a snapshot of people who have coverage at any point in time.

In fact, the percentage of people without coverage had remained unchanged in New York after the 1993 reforms. Later, when asked why the actuaries didn't wait for the 1993 census data, McCarthy told a reporter for the industry publication *BestWeek L/H* that sponsors wanted a timely study for use in the current health reform debate. McCarthy later told me "the census data don't contribute much to the discussion." He argued that the census data would have had to be further

analyzed by the Employee Benefit Research Institute, which couldn't complete that work until January 1995. "We felt it was appropriate to do with what we had on hand."

The authors also drew sweeping conclusions about who the 500,000 supposedly uninsured people were, asserting, "we believe that most of the insureds leaving the market are the young and healthy. It would appear that these people are not willing to accept significant rate increases to pay for the health care of others" — points often reiterated in the press. Nevertheless, the authors offered no evidence beyond their "belief" to support those assertions and not so much as a hint that this group was, in fact, the prime market for policies sold by Golden Rule and other carriers.

At the very least, reporters should have questioned the data. But they should also have looked more critically at several other clues scattered throughout the report that could have been used to challenge the study and develop a more accurate and complete picture of community rating in New York. Public debate would have been better served.

Page three of the report, for example, noted that the analysis "was commissioned by a number of organizations, including both small business and insurance carriers," and that the "results do not represent the input or opinions of any of the organizations which provided financial support," an acknowledgment that somebody paid for the study. Reporters should have asked who. McCarthy told me: "You are the first person who asked me about it other than the [New York State Insurance] Department." Without knowledge of who actually funded the study, the public was deprived of information needed to evaluate the validity of the claims it made.

The report contained two pages of limitations and hedges. The authors say, for example, "estimates in this study reflect our best estimates of anticipated events. Actual results may vary from our best estimates." Throughout the report are such phrases as "actual experience to analyze the true impact is not available" or "we have no actual data before reform to confirm this assumption" — disclaimers that should have prompted greater skepticism. The report also admitted that the data used had not been audited — a signal that perhaps the conclusions were not exactly as black and white as they seemed. In other words, data errors could "significantly impact these results," the report warned. The authors were careful to say that portions should not be excerpted and the report should be used in its entirety, a clear indication that the disclaimers were crucial. And an alert reporter could have picked up on the authors' speculation that some of the 500,000 people who supposedly dropped their policies might have found other coverage in neighboring states or from large or small employers. If that were the case, then the number of people without insurance would clearly be less than 500,000.

The one-sidedness of the conclusions should have prompted reporters to call the New York State Insurance Department for its thoughts on the matter. But from August 18 until the end of the month, the time when the 500,000 statistic got its widest circulation, only three media outlets — The Bureau of National Affairs, American Medical News, and *The Washington Post*, whose reporter Spencer Rich had been working on a commu-

nity rating story for several weeks — called the department.

Earlier in the year the department had issued its own verdict on community rating: the number of uninsured had gone up by only some 25,000. It attributed part of that rise to a hefty 25 percent rate increase by Empire Blue Cross (which had always used community rating and was unaffected by the reforms) and negative publicity surrounding the carrier's business practices. The department also found that community rating had provided greater rate stability and greater access to insurance, but for some "vulnerable" individuals, affordability of coverage remained a problem. It recommended that the legislature enact additional reforms to make coverage more affordable. A department internal memorandum "re-emphasized" that reform "did not cause any significant writer of health insurance in the state to leave the market" as some had threatened to do. The memo went on, "the small group market has been so competitive in the past year that some commercial insurers have re-filed for decreases in their originally filed community rates." None of these latter points appeared in any of the first wave of stories after the release of the Milliman & Robertson report. Earlier in the year, a few publications, including *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times*, mentioned the department's estimates of the number of people losing coverage in negative stories about community rating. *The New York Times*, while not mentioning the decline, gave a more complete picture of the issue.

In mid-September, the New York State Insurance Department fought back with a ferocity unusual for a state regulator more accustomed to protecting the insurance industry than attacking it. The department issued a press release rebuking Milliman & Robertson and in a letter to McCarthy asked the firm to publicly withdraw the report. It called the notion of failure "the big insurance lie of 1994," and contacted some forty-two media organizations. Only six showed any interest — The Associated Press, the Schenectady *Daily Gazette*, the *National Underwriter*, International Medical News Group, *The Legislative Gazette*, and *The Washington Post*. Wayne Cotter, director of research for the department, says some organizations told him that since they didn't cover the release of the report, they saw no reason to weigh in with the department's rebuttal — a stance that might at first glance seem reasonable but one that resulted in a missed opportunity for a good story and a chance to promote a useful dialogue.

The next crop of stories moved a bit closer to revealing the sponsors and the behind-the-scenes interests, now referring to them as a "business and insurance" group or noting that the study was "industry commissioned." They also gave the New York State Insurance Department a chance to air its side. *The Washington Post* pointed out the conflict between the department's estimates of those dropping coverage and Milliman & Robertson's numbers. But then the *Post* used a horror story of a young man whose monthly premiums increased from \$27 to \$102, without reporting a similar anecdote about someone whose premiums decreased. The story did allow the New York Superintendent of Insurance to summarize the law's accomplishments, and quoted McCarthy as saying that the 500,000 drop is "fundamentally correct." McCarthy also

acknowledged that "some part of the 500,000 could be due to other factors than the reform — we don't know the exact number." This was the firm's first sign of retreat. The AP ran a story citing the 500,000 statistic, but quoted the insurance department as saying the study was "flawed." It also quoted Senator Phil Gramm, Republican of Texas, as saying that insurance rates shot up by as much as 170 percent for thirty-year-old males — a statistic that was misleading since it reflected only one rate for one age group from one company. The number, quoted by other publications as well, came from the New York State Insurance Department, which also noted at the time that 40 percent of the people affected by the community rating law had seen their rates *decrease*. Only 5 percent, or about 2,400 individuals, had seen their rates increase by more than 100 percent.

In mid-October, the census bureau released 1993 data showing that the percentage of New Yorkers who were uninsured had not changed from 1992, the year before reforms took effect. Approximately 13.9 percent of the population had no insurance coverage in 1992 and in 1993, a leveling-off of an upward trend in New York, as well as nationally. Indeed, census bureau data showed that the percentage of uninsured increased, sometimes significantly, in twenty-seven other states. The insurance department issued another press release to publicize this finding. Again there were few takers. About the same time Milliman & Robertson issued a "clarification." In it, the firm, which had earlier admitted in a letter to the insurance department that it overcounted the number of people who had individual coverage before reform by about 265,000, now confessed that one data source it used was "materially incorrect." The clarification, which released the names of the two lead sponsors, said that now the "authors' best estimate" of the number of people losing coverage in the individual and small-group market was 405,000, but that there could be an error of 100,000 in either direction, perhaps even more. Milliman & Robertson also charged that the report had been used "out of context." Later Peter Cullum, vice president of Donley Communications, which represents the firm, said "there are a lot of errors in the coverage."

The last batch of stories still didn't reveal the sponsors. The Schenectady *Daily Gazette*, however, did give a good presentation of the new census data and other aspects of Milliman & Robertson's clarification, but the paper hardly has national impact. *Newsday* ran a piece grudgingly conceding that the New York State Insurance Department may have had a point all along. The writer, Dena Bunis, a veteran of the health reform beat, simply called the Milliman & Robertson report an "often-quoted private consulting firm study." (*BestWeek L/H* did identify the sponsors.)

In the meantime, community rating has helped to create a competitive market in New York, resulting in a significant number of filings for rate decreases by insurance carriers and HMOs. For its part, a Milliman & Robertson spokesman says "the position of the firm is they are standing behind the report as clarified." As for the press, it can expect increasing bombardment by such propaganda studies bought and paid for by groups that want to surreptitiously influence public discourse. ♦

On the Fast Track to Network News

STAR school

by Jeff Gremillion

It's a well-worn plot. The leading lady, suddenly unable to perform, yields the spotlight. An understudy gets her chance to show what she can do. The curtain goes up, and something clicks. A star is born.

For Juju Chang this was no Hollywood fantasy, and her stage wasn't on Broadway. It was in the Bronx in 1992, when Chang was assisting ABC correspondent Karen Burnes on a story about a local school. "It was just a nice, little, tiny piece for the morning news," she says. "At the last minute Karen was called off to follow Ross Perot. There were no other correspondents available. I called in and said, 'I've got the piece in the can. The story writes itself. Let me do it.'" She was given a green light.

As it happens, the ABC corporate bigshots who are making things happen for Chang don't even recall her big break. So, technically, it wasn't her big break at all. But it was her first taste of network air, and she wanted more.

Her official big break has just begun, and to observe it is to get a feel for network-news star-making, circa 1995.

Jeff Gremillion is assistant editor at CJR.

After seven years at ABC, Chang, now twenty-nine, has been placed in a special "correspondent development" program with the intention that she become "a full-fledged network correspondent in the shortest amount of time possible," as Amy Entelis, ABC vice-president of talent, recruitment, and development, puts it. The official mission of the year-and-a-half-old program, Entelis says, is "to broaden the pool of people from which we can pick correspondents." The program is "minority-oriented," she adds, but, although Chang is a Korean-American and the other two current participants in the program are black women, it is not limited to minority group members. Entelis sees it as a "bridge" for people from various backgrounds with qualities useful to the network. For example, she says, if ABC wanted to make a medical correspondent out of a doctor, the network would put him or her through the program.

"You have to sound like a network correspondent. You have to look like a network correspondent," says Entelis. "You have to pull it off."

Such a program, with its hint of Hollywood style star-making, is relatively

new. Neither NBC nor CNN has a program quite like ABC's, with a stated mission to produce on-air reporters, but CBS recently launched a minority reporter training program of its own. NBC last year began a ten-month "Assistant Producers Associates" program to train a multicultural group of recent college graduates in TV journalism. CNN's "Video Journalists" program, which has existed since the network's inception in 1980, is more an entry-level apprenticeship than a star machine. Network insiders do brag, however, about CNN's track record in recruiting correspondents of diverse backgrounds — and from inside the company. The award-winning international correspondent Christiane Amanpour is a case in point.

The first reporter admitted to the ABC program, in the summer of 1993, was Michele Norris, a former *Washington Post* reporter who recently moved from covering the White House on weekends for the network to a regular beat covering Washington's regulatory agencies. The second, Karla Davis, who was admitted six months after Norris, was a reporter at a local TV station in Jacksonville, Florida, before ABC snatched

ROBERT TRACHENBERG

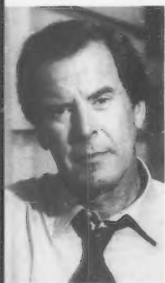
Chang interviews
kids for a story
for KGO in
San Francisco;
her progress will
be monitored
by ABC officials
in New York



her up and sent her to its San Francisco affiliate, KGO.

Chang, though, is something of a pet in the program, perhaps because of her long stint at the network. People keep telling her she's got *it* — that nebulous combination of skill, good looks, and charm that all network news stars have. "It's one thing to say she's going to be a correspondent," says Holly Peterson, a producer at ABC News and a friend of Chang's. "It's another to say she's going to be the next Barbara Walters or Diane Sawyer. People have told her that."

She has another essential quality — ambition. Chang is a consummate professional who always dresses for success. "If I'm having a bad day, I might just walk into the office without my contact lenses, with my cowboy boots



'94. Entelis gives those stories mixed reviews, but she gives Chang high marks in some areas. "She has tremendous poise on the air. She has presence. She's a decent little writer, but she'll have to work on that."

Last November Chang joined Davis, her colleague in the correspondent development program, at KGO in the San Francisco area, where she had grown up. She'll probably stay there about a year covering "anything and everything" as a general-assignment reporter, according to KGO news director Milt Weiss, who spent a number of years in New York as a senior producer at *World News Tonight* before moving to California in 1990.

"I know how the network operates," says Weiss. "I know what it looks for in a correspondent." Weiss insists, however, that he won't single Chang out in any

Bourin says that as far as he's concerned, the poise and presentation part of the program is far from the most important aspect of the training. "We're going to look at the writing," Bourin says. "We're going to look at the presentation. We're going to look at her journalism. I'm not a fashion consultant, and I'm not a voice coach. We're not in the business of making Kewpie dolls."

Kewpie dolls or no, it can't be denied that Chang has at least two extra qualities — factors that have nothing to do with journalistic prowess or ability — working for her: she looks ethnic, and she's beautiful.

It's never too hard to find healthy skepticism when one speaks of "stars" in TV news. Especially now, with a proliferation of newsmagazine shows expanding

"The term 'image-building' makes

on and my hair in a ponytail," says Peterson. "Juju would never do that."

Chang joined ABC in 1987, days after graduating from Stanford with a political science degree, and moved quickly from desk assistant to researcher. As a researcher, she was sent to Seoul, South Korea, for the 1988 Olympics, where her ability to speak Korean served her well. In 1990, she moved up to reportorial producer, a job that took her to Saudi Arabia during the gulf war. In 1992, just after the presidential elections, she was made a producer and spent three months in Little Rock putting together stories about President Clinton's transition to power.

For a time in 1990, Chang spent her days off from ABC working as a reporter for News 12, a cable station on Long Island. She showed those tapes to Entelis and to others at the network, seeking feedback on how to become a better reporter. "She took the initiative," says Entelis. "If a person isn't driven, it doesn't happen."

About a year after Chang's Bronx tale, Entelis arranged for her to do six stories as a correspondent for ABC over eight months, including a news piece for *Good Morning America* on Woodstock

way or give her special attention he wouldn't give any new reporters. "But we'll certainly talk about what she does," he says.

Chang's progress will be monitored by Lennart Bourin, her coach back in New York. Bourin, who began working with her before she moved west, is the journalistic Henry Higgins of the correspondent development program. "When they decide on the fifth floor what they want to do and who they want to do it with, they call me," says Bourin. He critiques tapes, goes out on stories, and reviews the mechanics of being on the air with his students.

"We had a session where I sat down in a room and went through a series of stand-ups," says Chang. "He coached me on ways to maintain a professional tone — how to sound more authoritative, how to phrase things the right way." The network also provided Chang with voice lessons. "They teach you things like they teach singers," she says. The "la-la-la thing," she adds, was a bit disconcerting.

Bourin and others back in New York will critique Chang's San Francisco stories each week, says Entelis. "And three times a year he'll fly out there to coach her."

the need for on-air personalities, and with a line between news and entertainment that's blurrier than ever. (A major player in this TV-magazine world is NBC's thrice-weekly *Dateline*, whose executive producer, Neal Shapiro, is engaged to marry Chang.)

A former top-level insider at ABC News who spoke off the record has skepticism to spare. She calls the network's star system "twisted." "There is a mentality there that 'we will make you a star.' You've got to have the look. It's important to have a look that's uniquely yours. Some of the people chosen to be star correspondents are just big, dumb empty suits."

"The people who are stars are picked because they're either good-looking or they have some quirky charisma," says Marlene Sanders, former correspondent at ABC and CBS News, and now an administrator at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. "Sam Donaldson is not really the movie-star type, but he's got pizzazz. If you're just a good reporter, forget about it."

Jon Katz, the media critic for *New York* magazine and a former producer at CBS News, says "warmth" and good looks are essential in the makeup of a

network news star, particularly the anchor. "You can't be a network news anchor and be stupid; it's not the airhead versus the intellectual. But the person's journalistic ability does not come first," he says. "Before anything else, you have to be attractive and charismatic."

And conventional wisdom at the networks, says Katz, is that "men can get older and still be attractive. Women tend not to last as long." Men also have a greater license to be quirky, he adds.

The reasons for this are clear to Sanders, who co-wrote with Marcia Rock the book *Waiting for Prime Time*, which bemoaned sexism and ageism in network news. "Who creates a star? The people who run the news divisions. Who runs news divisions? Men," she says. "They go by their gonads."

And in 1995, it also helps to look ethnic, says Katz. "Asian-American personalities are

stardom." NBC honchos have said publicly that Williams is in line to succeed Tom Brokaw as anchor. Brokaw — and CBS anchor Dan Rather — covered the White House before claiming their anchor desks.

That kind of image building isn't foolproof; NBC's star machine has backfired a few times in recent years, most notably with the *Today* show. Deborah Norville was certainly groomed for stardom, but she was seen by the public as an evil home-wrecker when she replaced Jane Pauley as co-anchor in 1990.

But ABC is widely considered to have the most invested in big names. "They spend a lot of money," Katz says. "They find the right vehicles. [ABC News president] Rooney Arledge is by far the greatest genius in star building." Arledge, a man with no background in journalism,

colleagues.

"It was a dreadful mistake, a foolish experiment," says Jennings, who returned to the field as a foreign correspondent for more than a decade before resuming his position as anchor. "I'm the classic example of how not to do it. I'm glad it didn't hurt me more than it did.

"People think this is silly," he adds, "but the most important thing anybody can bring to this business is their mind."

Network news divisions have been in the star-making business since the dawn of television, says Barbara Matusow, author of *The Evening Stars*, a 1983 book that details the rise of dozens of news stars. Matusow, a senior editor at *Washingtonian* magazine who wrote an article about Brian Williams for the magazine's December issue, says the phenomenon has received more attention since the

me grate my teeth," says Jennings

very popular in television news."

The youth and beauty aspects of news stardom have been publicly scrutinized for years. A former local anchor, Christine Craft, brought the issue to the fore with her 1983 lawsuit against a Kansas City TV station alleging she was demoted to a reporter because she was "too old, too ugly, and not deferential enough to men." She lost the suit in 1986 when the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case.

"The networks basically use the Hollywood studio system in manufacturing stars," Katz says. "The way you make a news star is the same way you make a movie star: control their publicity, how they dress, where they go . . . the roles they're in."

At NBC, for example, the machinery seems to be at full throttle for Brian Williams, the handsome thirty-five-year-old who recently replaced network veteran Andrea Mitchell as chief White House correspondent. (She became the network's chief foreign-affairs correspondent.) "The White House is a key superstar beat, a high-profile beat," says Verne Gay, who reports on TV for *New York Newsday*. "They're putting him on a fast track to

ascended to the news presidency from the sports division after he successfully injected an element of showbiz razzle-dazzle into the network's sports coverage. He is credited with (or blamed for) buying a number of superstars for ABC News and for paying superstar salaries to such journalists as Walters, Sawyer, Ted Koppel, and anchor Peter Jennings.

For his part, Jennings denies there is a Hollywood influence in his shop. "The term 'image-building' makes me grate my teeth. I'm not interested in any reporter's persona, per se," he says.

"We are, after all, talking about journalism."

Jennings knows better than most how far good looks and charm alone will take you. In 1965, as a twenty-six-year-old with the looks of a model — and just about as much experience reporting — he was made ABC's anchor. It was a disaster. He was called a "glamorcaster" by the critics and scoffed at by his

advent of powerful agents and multimillion-dollar salaries — more spillovers from Hollywood. But developmental programs like ABC's are new, she says, and they're a good idea. If you're going to turn people into stars, at least make

sure they know what they're doing. "They've seen someone they like; they think she has some good broadcasting capabilities," Matusow says of ABC and Chang. "They're trying to make sure she has the training."

For her part, Chang is well aware of what the cynics say about the nature of stardom in today's network news. She even agrees with them, to a degree.

"I would like to be able to say honestly that [appearance] has no impact, but, if we can generalize, it does," says Chang, who has been asked for her autograph by fans convinced she was Connie Chung. "The ideal would be to tell a good story and let that be the face that represents you." ♦



Michele Norris, the first graduate of ABC's correspondent development program, is currently based in Washington



How to Fathom THE FED

by Eileen Shanahan

It was November 1, a Tuesday, and Kenneth N. Gilpin, a reporter in *The New York Times* business section, had a tough assignment for the next day's paper. He had to explain why both stock prices and bond prices had dropped dramatically in the face of good news about the economy.

That seemingly weird reaction had been occurring pretty much all year, of course, as the Federal Reserve System raised interest rates, again and again, in an effort to keep the economy from growing so fast it would ignite inflation. And it had been explained, again and again, by reporters who covered the financial markets. Usually, they said that given the Fed's determination to cool things off, investors felt that any new statistic indicating that the expansion was still going strong probably meant yet another Federal Reserve move toward higher rates, slowing growth and hurting at least the short-term value of their holdings. And that is just what Gilpin said in his lead.

Eileen Shanahan covered national economic policy from Washington for The New York Times and other newspapers for thirty years. She is now the Washington correspondent for the New America News Service.

But he had an extra problem to deal with that day; just the previous Friday, the stock and bond markets had done the exact opposite. They'd gone *up* in the wake of a batch of favorable economic statistics. And analysts had taken that as a sign the markets were suddenly no longer afraid of good news.

Gilpin grasped the nettle firmly.

"The reverse in course yesterday," he wrote, "seems to reflect how nervous investors are about inflation and how unsure they are about the economic outlook. That uncertainty makes it easy for the market to shift its course sharply from day to day as it digests new economic data."

There was only one thing wrong with that. Like virtually all coverage of the financial markets, it was based on the unstated assumption that whatever happens in those markets always has a rational basis.

Gilpin does not deserve to be singled out for criticism about this. He handled his assignment better than many had done, on the *Times* or elsewhere, through the year. He had resisted the standard temptation to reach out for any development he could find, obscure or otherwise, that would "explain" exactly why stock and bond prices had done the unexpected again.

But the persistent assumption that

the decisions of all the professionals and amateurs who buy or sell securities, on any given day, always add up to a result that is somehow "right" is nonsense. And the unremitting coverage based on that notion, considering how completely market news dominates overall economic news with its sheer daily volume and the play it gets, gave the public little help in deciphering the economic events of 1994 and the Fed's role in them.

It does need to be noted, immediately, that the reporters who spend full time covering national economic policy, most of whom work in Washington, are generally very good. They really understand economics, work hard at it, and write it so the public can understand, too.

Still, rereading hundreds of their stories, including newsmagazine pieces and TV scripts, written over the past year, it is impossible not to be struck by how often their coverage of Federal Reserve policy looked to financial market analysis for validation of the Fed's actions. And how often they omitted other important information that might have shed quite a different light on them.

That is not to say that Federal Reserve policy was wrong; the returns are not in, and the evidence that the Fed

may be right keeps getting stronger. The point is that the coverage, especially the stories aimed at the general reader, detailed the factors and opinions that buttressed the Fed's reasoning much more often and more completely than it did those that weakened it. In fact, except at the start of the Fed's series of rate increases in February and March, the A-section stories seldom dealt in more than a cursory way with the basic questions that were being raised by the Federal Reserve's actions.

There were at least four such questions. Did it make sense for Chairman Alan Greenspan and the other Fed policy makers to see a threat of inflation when more than eight million people remained out of work? Can there really be a danger of inflation when the Consumer Price Index and the other major statistics on prices are consistently showing the smallest increases in years? Is the Fed right in arguing that its actions will benefit even the unemployed because higher interest rates will keep the economy expanding more slowly, but for a longer period of time, during which unemployment will continue to drop? And while it's widely accepted that the Fed has to act before there are conclusive signs of inflation (because the effects of rate increases are not immediate) is it also true that it must act early because inflation, once started, necessarily gets worse and worse, and is much harder to reverse than any recession that could result from its actions?

Greenspan and most of his colleagues among the Fed's leaders have answered with a ringing affirmative to every one of these questions. And they have cited the interest-rate increases in the bond market, which were outdoing anything the Fed was directly causing, as confirmation that they were right to see inflation just over the horizon.

There were, in fact, reasons other than a fear of inflation, or even a reaction to the Fed's actions, for the behavior of the financial markets.

On May 20, *The Wall Street Journal* published one of its famous, long, page one "leaders," by Washington-based David Wessel and New York-based Laura Jereski and Randall Smith, which explained in compelling detail that an awful lot of the recent plunge in bond

prices had nothing to do with fears of inflation. Rather, the reason was that the Fed's actions raising rates had caught a large number of speculators with huge sums of money invested in complicated ways that amounted to bets that interest rates would remain low. Therefore, they'd been dumping these investments as fast as they could, now that the Fed was raising rates, and that was what was pushing bond prices down and interest rates up.

But this important insight, based on some impressive reporting, essentially disappeared from the *Journal* after that one story, even though everyone in the financial markets knew that speculative positions of this kind had not disappeared from the markets with that one shakeout.

This now-you-read-it-now-you-don't history of one particular *Journal* story is just a single example of the sort of thing that kept happening all year: good reporters kept forgetting to point out to their readers important things they knew perfectly well themselves, things that had a real bearing on the issue of whether the Fed's policy was the right one.

On October 26, for another example among many that might be chosen, *The Washington Post's* business section carried a piece by John M. Berry on the exceedingly small increases in employee wages and benefits through the first nine months of the year, as detailed in a new report from the Labor Department. Although the same story noted, correctly, that the Federal Reserve was expected to approve yet another rate increase the next time its policy committee met, Berry's lead said forthrightly that the new figures "suggested that the fear [of inflation] may be exaggerated." But it was the only time he highlighted this highly significant information. And not in the A-section pages that are seen by the general readers.

Somebody has called this the "I already wrote that" syndrome. It is a common ailment among journalists on every beat — as if writing something once has fixed it forever in the minds of the readers and viewers.

Much other important economic information was carried, throughout the year, only on business pages or broad-

casts tailored for a business audience, and virtually never saw even an inside page in anybody's A-section. That was a fate also shared by the knowledgeable and readable copy filed by Martin Crutsinger of the AP Washington bureau and several of his colleagues.

Among the significant matters thus essentially hidden from average readers were developments that indicated that the American economy of today is part of a changed world. Numerous new factors are operating to constrain inflation, whereas the Fed seemed, to many, to be acting on outdated facts and assumptions.

One of the new phenomena is the huge expansion of international trade

THE COVERAGE GETS THINNER

The ranks of newspapers with their own Washington coverage of national economic policy, the beat that includes the Federal Reserve, have thinned dramatically in recent years.

Among the larger newspaper-group bureaus, Knight-Ridder, Newhouse, Scripps Howard, Copley, and Cox no longer have anyone regularly assigned full-time to economics. The Hearst reporter is also the bureau's principal projects person. Gannett has no one, although Gannett papers do have access to copy produced by the *USA Today* staff.

Among the more prestigious newspapers that have had nobody on the beat recently are the *Chicago Tribune*, *The Boston Globe*, and the *Baltimore Sun*.

Aside from *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post*, each of which has several, almost the only papers that assign even one full-time Washington staff member are the *Los Angeles Times* and *The Dallas Morning News*.

The frequency of front-page play the *Dallas* paper gives to economic policy stories by Washington reporter Robert Dodge is noteworthy. Especially valuable are his monthly page-one wrap-ups of recent economic developments, often done the day the new unemployment figures come out, on the theory that reader interest in the economy is then at its peak.

and competition. The increasing availability of imports, quite simply, limits the ability of many American producers to charge higher prices.

Another is the widely publicized mass layoffs of recent years, which have made both union and nonunion workers more hesitant about asking for increased wages and benefits. Even in manufacturing, employee compensation is the major cost of production, but in an economy increasingly dominated by services, labor costs amount to about two-thirds of the expenses of producing everything businesses make and do in this country. As John Berry's piece indicated, if labor costs aren't rising much, there's little or no source of inflationary pressure from that side of the economy.

The recent solid increases in U.S. productivity, defined as what one worker can produce in one hour, hold costs and prices down, too. Productivity has long been described as the magic that permits wages to go up while prices remain stable. Since it's been rising faster than wages lately, that leaves room for somewhat larger wage increases without any inflationary consequences.

Improved worker productivity results, in part, from all those layoffs but also from the huge investments businesses have been making in new and more efficient facilities and equipment. And that's still going on, with effects on productivity yet to be fully realized. This surge in business spending on new plants and machinery does get covered in stories on the growth of the Gross Domestic Product, to which it contributes quite a bit, and these do often make the network news or start on page one. But its role in controlling inflation does not appear in stories discussing the wisdom or unwisdom of Federal Reserve policy. Certainly not those that ran in the main news sections of the newspapers, or on general-interest broadcast news programs.

Furthermore, all this shiny new plant and equipment, which will require less downtime for maintenance, should enable businesses to operate all out — closer to 100 percent of theoretical capacity than in the past — without threatening inflation. That is a point that has barely been made, even on the

The administration didn't yell, and reporters didn't look elsewhere for responsible criticism

business pages, even though today's historically high rate of what's known as "capacity utilization" has been given as one of the big reasons why the Fed is so worried about inflation.

All these matters add up to a considerable body of evidence that the policymakers at the Federal Reserve are relying on history, and maybe history is no longer a reliable guide.

Nor did the strong challenges to the Fed's rationale and actions from Democratic members of Congress get much play. The lively anti-Fed rhetoric of Sen. Paul Sarbanes of Maryland, for one, was sometimes quoted, but the detailed statistics he provided to back up his criticisms were not. What was worse, any story that quoted any part of what he said almost always noted that he was up for reelection, as if that somehow rendered his substantive arguments wholly invalid.

The unwillingness of President Clinton and his top economic policy team to make any public case against interest rate increases, after about March or April, also contributed greatly to the imbalance in coverage. If the president or Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen or top economic advisers like Laura D'Andrea Tyson had been challenging the Fed, they would surely have been quoted at length. But they hadn't been, quite likely because they feared that such arguments might be heard in the financial markets as a statement that the administration just didn't give a rap

about inflation, an inference that might literally have panicked the financial markets.

Another explanation for the silence of Clinton and his people may be that they had come to believe the Fed might be right, though they plainly did not in the beginning. That is a thesis for which there is some evidence in the views of such individuals as Alan S. Blinder, now Clinton's appointee as vice chairman of the Federal Reserve Board, but until recently a member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers. He comes pretty close to accepting the Fed's arithmetic about the levels of economic growth and unemployment where the danger of inflation sets in.

Whatever the reasons for the hush that came over the administration, journalists apparently felt absolved from looking elsewhere for responsible critics of the interest rate increases.

On the Fed's side of the argument, some important aspects went undercovered, too, or ran only in the business sections or on those few broadcasts specifically aimed at a business audience.

One centers on what may be yet another basic change in the workings of the economy: the development of the phenomenon sometimes called the "dual" labor force. People with good educations and training and significant experience have quite low rates of unemployment, despite all the widely publicized layoffs of middle managers. The labor force may soon start running short of such people, the Fed and others think, and that could put some real upward pressure on wages. This, too, has mostly been discussed only on the business pages or on TV and radio programs aimed at a business audience.

Another development on the pro-Fed side is what has happened to "producer prices." Even on the business pages, the headlines and stories have focused mostly on the figure that summarizes the overall picture — the prices of everything from the iron ore to the new car as it leaves the factory — and that hardly went up at all. But there was a substantial run-up in prices of what are called "intermediate" goods, the stage in between raw materials and finished

products. While many makers of finished products report that they are finding resistance to increased prices on what they are selling, they also say they can't go on indefinitely paying more to their suppliers without charging their customers more.

Also largely missing from the coverage, as the year wore on, was the widely accepted view, even among economists who are Democrats and liberals, that the "Federal Funds" interest rate — the basic rate the Fed kept raising — was unsustainably low when the Fed began its series of rate increases in February. It had been pushed down to 3 percent in 1992 during the early stages of recovery from the 1990-91 recession, specifically to stimulate additional economic activity.

Not until the May 1994 rate increase, the fourth of the year, did Fed officials feel they had reached the point where they had stopped stimulating growth and reached a neutral stance. By that time, there were many who argued that they'd gone far past that stage into clamping down on growth. Among them were the president of the National Association of Manufacturers, himself an economist, and the chief economist of the Chamber of Commerce, both ordinarily supporters of conservative economic policy. Along with labor leaders, who had been complaining from the beginning, these business spokesmen protested even more vociferously when the Fed — acknowledging that it was now restraining growth — went to 4 3/4 percent in August and 5 1/2 percent in November.

And another thing: those who, right from the start, back in February, said the Fed's actions would stop the expansion in its tracks have simply been proved wrong. Quarter by quarter, the economy has been growing more rapidly than almost anyone expected. By the fall, at close to 4 percent, the pace was faster than even most liberal economists believe can be sustained for long without inflation.

One of the most important underreported points on the Fed's side of the argument is this: almost all economists, regardless of ideology, think it takes

Some arguments against the Fed's moves — and some in favor — went largely unreported

nine to twelve months before interest rate increases have their full effect on the economy. Thus, as Greenspan and other Fed officials explained over and over, their actions were not aimed at reining in the economy as it existed back in February or March or even November, but as they believed it would exist later on. The press initially took to calling the Fed's actions a "preemptive strike" against inflation, which was a useful characterization. But the term largely disappeared from the coverage later on, even though rate increases were voted, again and again, still without signs of here-and-now inflation, and few solid suggestions of inflation on the way.

Assuming the estimate of a lag of nine to twelve months is correct, it is now time for the consequences of the Fed's series of interest rate increases to manifest themselves. If they don't, if the economy keeps growing at its current, hefty rate, that will constitute substantial support for the conclusion that the Fed was right all along: that the economy really was threatening to expand at a very high rate of speed back in February, when it began raising rates and trying to slow things down.

But that still wouldn't prove that accelerating inflation would inevitably have accompanied growth at that pace. Alan Blinder, for one, does not accept the view of Alan Greenspan and most of the other Fed policymakers that once the

inflation rate starts to rise, it only keeps getting worse, nor their belief that inflation, once started, is much harder to reverse than a recession. The latter is perhaps Greenspan's most strongly felt argument for the preemptive strikes.

Those are all crucial points that have seldom shown up in places where ordinary readers would hear or see them.

Keith Bradsher of *The New York Times* Washington bureau is one of those who has repeatedly discussed with considerable sophistication, in business-section stories, the arguments against what the Fed was doing, as well as the arguments in support.

But he has usually left the anti-Fed arguments out of his front-page pieces.

He explains this on the ground that "the main question I have to answer the day the Federal Reserve acts is why the heck would they even dream of raising interest rates when the economy still hasn't produced jobs for seven and a half million Americans and when inflation is very low. The arguments why not tend to be more obvious to a general reader than the Fed's reasoning for doing it, which tends to require more explanation.

"Besides," he adds, "a strong demand exists [from *Times* editors] for the political context of interest rate increases, which tends to get short shrift in the business section stories There is also my own desire to put a rate increase in a context that not only business executives and bond traders will understand but also general readers, who may not pay attention to interest rates on a daily basis but may be very interested in politics."

Those are respectable arguments.

But shaping economic policy stories by that logic, and presenting most of them only to a business audience, implies a belief that most readers care less about the economy than they do about Bosnia, for example, or welfare reform. It adds up to a philosophy of covering most of the economic news the same way journalism covers sports — on the assumption that the people who really want to know the details will know where to find them. But informing the public about economic policy is more important than that. ♦



The Lure of FEDTHINK

by Paul Starobin

Alan Greenspan is not a media hog. The chairman of the Federal Reserve Board does not call press conferences or regularly appear on television news talk shows; his jargon-studded, carefully hedged testimony to congressional committees is almost unsoundbitable. Slouch-shouldered, soft-spoken, and bespectacled, he comes across as an unworldly college professor.

Psst: It's an act. Greenspan is keenly interested in media coverage of the Fed. In fact, he tries to shape it through frequent off the record interviews with the small band of beat reporters who cover his institution. He counters coverage he thinks is wrong or threatening to the Fed; he quietly defends himself against rowdy critics such as Henry B. Gonzalez of Texas, who as chairman of the House Banking Committee kept up a steady fire on Fed secrecy. "You go in there and he says, 'Henry Gonzalez doesn't know what he's talking about,'" says a reporter who has visited Greenspan. But under the hush-hush ground rules set by the Fed chairman, the journalists are not even allowed to report that they have had a talk with a senior Fed official. It's as if the whole thing never happened.

The secret Greenspan sessions (past chairmen Paul Volcker and Arthur Burns did pretty much the same thing) are an example of the Fed's media strategy: soft spin, no fingerprints. It works quite well. Reporters who have been ushered into the chairman's office in the Fed's white-marble headquarters (I'm

one of them) feel as if a veil has been lifted, if only for a moment. They're face to face with perhaps the most powerful economic-policymaker in the world. "I think it's masterful on his part," Fed reporter James E. Risen of the *Los Angeles Times* says of the Greenspan *tête-à-têtes*, "but it co-opts you." After all, a critical article could mean the end of those talks with the chairman, putting a competitive reporter at a disadvantage.

Because much of what the Fed does is secret, such tactics are especially seductive. The Fed turns its need to be close-mouthed on some matters — Greenspan can't talk openly about pending monetary-policy options without the risk of rattling financial markets — to its advantage. "Remember, secrecy is power," says Ted Balbach, who spent seventeen years as research director for the St. Louis Fed.

Perhaps the real genius of the no-fingerprints tack is that it preserves the Fed's cherished reputation for being above the political fray. Since its creation by Congress in 1913, the institution has widely been viewed as a temple of economic science, a kind of sanctuary from the earthy world of politics. But as a practical matter, the Fed's bureaucratic imperative is no different from any other Washington agency's: to protect and advance the goals of the institution by all available means, including press spin.

It's a full-time job. In the tradition of populists before him, Gonzalez has been pushing reforms that would, among other things, permit Congress to audit the Fed's secret monetary-policy deliberations. And Senator Paul Sarbanes of Maryland proposes to strip the Fed's

dozen regional bank presidents of their votes on monetary policy. Such changes would make the Fed more answerable to Congress and to the public, but the Fed and its supporters say they would remove the layer of political insulation that central banks must have in order to stave off inflation-producing demands for lower interest rates.

The Fed's stake in thwarting populist changes that it views as dangerous explains its alarmed reaction to a story by Alan S. Murray that appeared on the front page of *The Wall Street Journal* back on April 5, 1991. Murray, an ex-Fed reporter who now heads the newspaper's Washington bureau, is one of the few beat reporters in recent years who have risked the Fed's ire with sharp-angled coverage of its inner dynamics. That piece was about senior Fed policymakers, including some of the regional-bank presidents, who were challenging the authority of Greenspan to set interest rates without consulting his colleagues. A page-one story in *The New York Times* three days later covered the same ground.

Ten days after that *The Washington Post's* John M. Berry, the dean of the Fed-reporter fraternity and a favorite of the Fed, weighed in with a front-page piece, studded with inside-the-Fed material that had been given to him and that cast doubt on both articles. After it appeared, the story all but died. A congressional source with whom I spoke at the time was one of those who attributed the story's demise to the Fed's spin-control deftness. "With one John Berry story, they killed it off," the source said. "That's spectacular." Berry, for his part, says he can't recall any instance "in which anyone at the Fed has called me

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to try to get me to do a story to counter another story."

Some of the credit for the Fed's media skill has to go to Greenspan, a longtime companion of NBC News's Andrea Mitchell (and ex-beau of ABC News's Barbara Walters). He always invites a handful of Fed beat reporters, typically from *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, to join Cabinet secretaries and other guests at his annual Fourth of July fireworks party at the Fed. More fun, including hiking, tennis, and white-water rafting awaits Fed reporters — including many of the same elite crew — invited with their spouses to the Kansas City Fed's economics conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, every August.

Greenspan has plenty of help with the press from Joseph R. Coyne, a former Associated Press economics reporter who joined the board's public-affairs office in 1968. A rare fingerprint was left by Coyne in a recently unearthed 1974 memo that he had sent to Arthur Burns, Fed chairman at the time. Burns and Coyne had been fretting over irrelevant pieces on the Fed written by a *Post* Style-section reporter, Nicholas von Hoffman. In the memo, Coyne tells Burns that the *Post* economics reporter Hobart Rowen — for whom Burns was a valuable source — "thinks it would be an excellent idea for you to discuss the [von Hoffman] matter with [then *Post* publisher] Katharine Graham." Von Hoffman, who says none of his *Post* superiors ever warned him off the Fed stories, professes bafflement that his pieces even got the Fed's attention. "This is the same mentality as the diamond monopoly — anything that gets out that is critical drives them crazy."

Yet the Fed is not a monolith, and its officials on occasion try to use the press to undermine policymakers within their own ranks. One of the Fed's new governors, vice chairman Alan S. Blinder, was recently on the receiving end of such a blade in the back. At this summer's Jackson Hole get-together, Blinder angered some senior Fed officials by remarking in a speech that the Fed's job was to pursue not only stable prices but also maximum employment. This is, on paper,

The Federal Reserve's media strategy: soft spin, no fingerprints

official Fed policy, but the speech was politically incorrect: Blinder, a liberal Democrat appointed by Bill Clinton, seemed to be departing from the Fed party line on the supreme need to protect against an inflation outbreak. At a barbecue that evening, some Fed officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, skewered Blinder in comments to Keith Bradsher, the Fed reporter for *The New York Times*. Bradsher ran with a story that sparked a press furor about whether Blinder was "soft" on inflation and a true-blue central banker. The novice policymaker, in effect, got publicly indoctrinated into the Fed.

As this episode shows, the institutional imperative that drives the Fed's media-relations strategy is linked to its main policy imperative: inflation control. Although the Fed's congressional charter explicitly directs it to pursue both stable prices and maximum employment, most Fed policymakers, like most central bankers, think their most important objective is price stability. Greenspan, in fact, has endorsed a change in the congressional charter to make "zero inflation" the Fed's sole mission. Such a change would delight bond dealers on Wall Street, for example, who lose money when a rise in inflation cheapens the value of their holdings, but not manufacturers, the housing industry, labor unions, and others whose top priority is a strong economy.

By November, when the Fed raised rates for the sixth time, such voices were getting louder and more difficult to ignore. *The Washington Post* managed

to do so, however, on November 16, the day after the latest hike. The *Post*'s Berry produced a page-one piece that explained the Fed's action without a single mention that anyone opposed it. (The piece, oddly, was illustrated on the inside jump with a picture of an anti-rate-hike demonstration, although the protesters' thinking was never explained.) Compare that with the same day's *New York Times*. Keith Bradsher's page-one news story referred to rate-hike opponents and their reasoning, and it was accompanied by a page-one analysis by Louis Uchitelle, headlined A DEBATE ON THE GREATER EVIL: INFLATION OR CHILL OF PINK SLIPS.

Berry says his goal in general is "to explain what's going on." David Ignatius, the *Post*'s top financial editor, says Berry "is seen as so experienced and knowledgeable that when he writes something, the market takes it as a signal. I think that produces a delicate problem: when your reporting is taken that seriously, reporters often feel that they have to be very careful and responsible. Too much of that is the enemy of aggressive journalism."

Fed beat reporters ought to be agnostic on such matters as zero inflation. But much Fed reporting is analysis and speculation gathered from experts, and any reporter who enters the orbit of Fed and ex-Fed policymakers and analysts — many of the "Fedwatcher" bond-dealer economists who track the Fed are ex-Fed staff members; many academics have ties — is in danger of getting sucked in. The Fed has "plants all over the place," says a veteran Fed reporter, Rob Norton of *Fortune*. This Fed network subtly exerts what the *Los Angeles Times*'s Risen calls "an intellectual spin — a condescending attitude toward people who don't understand or accept their assumptions about how the world works." This can be "a very intimidating thing," Risen adds.

How to combat Fedthink? "You need a wide, wide range of sources," says *The Wall Street Journal*'s Murray. You can still ask Coyne to set up one of those "we-never-spoke" sessions with Greenspan — every Fed reporter should have that experience — but remember, too, that everything, access to the highest priest in the Fed temple included, has its price. ♦



"The Forans, Cape Hatteras"



EUGENE RICHARDS: SOCIAL REALIST

BY WILLIAM MCGOWAN

Working in the tradition of Jacob Riis, Walker Evans, and Robert Frank, Eugene Richards has spent his career documenting conditions on the front lines of violence, drug addiction, poverty, racism, and cancer.

*His first journalistic experience was in the Klan-infested Arkansas Delta, where he ran a small community newspaper after serving as a VISTA volunteer in the late sixties. A book, *Few Comforts or Surprises: The Arkansas Delta*, about black sharecroppers, grew out of that work. Subsequent books include *Exploding Into Life*, which documented the cancer death of his wife; *The Knife and Gun Club*, which explored gang violence through the prism of a big-city emergency room; and most recently *Americans We*, a collection of his work.*

*Richards's 1994 book *Cocaine True, Cocaine Blue*, a hellish look at hard-core drug addiction among the urban underclass, was his most controversial. He had hoped its bold imagery would trigger a discussion about drugs in American society. Instead, his depiction of the crack epidemic — which disproportionately affects minority groups, according to experts — caused some critics to charge "representational racism."*

*The images in *Americans We* are more personal than his previous work, and more patriotic, although his trademark bleakness is there as well. They are also less explicitly journalistic, concerned with the mundane — marriages, births, veteran's parades — which Richards says "ultimately speak most centrally to what it's like to be alive."*



"Mariella, East New York"



"Gay Parents"

"The Forans, Cape Hatteras" (previous page) originated in a *Life* magazine assignment to examine the diverse nature of American family life. Ed Foran, an electrician and father of fourteen who took his kids out of school to educate them at home in Vernon, New Jersey, invited Richards to join his family on vacation. Although Foran held authoritarian and sexist values that Richards did not personally agree with, he found Foran a gregarious, complex man doing well by his family. "I knew in my mind people like Ed were an endangered species — that they feel like they are at some land's end ready to fall into the ocean. Whether the values they espouse are right or wrong, that sense of family being at the core of everything is breaking apart."

"Parents, Arizona" documents a gay couple's first night with their new baby boy, born two months earlier in a co-parenting arrangement with a lesbian couple. What struck Richards was how traditional-minded the couple were, how they phrased their hopes for their child in the same language Ed Foran did, something Foran "would have found surprising," Richards chuckles.

The image above was snapped at 5:30 A.M., after a night of fitful sleep for everyone. Stationed outside the bedroom door, Richards

would go in and photograph whenever he heard rustling inside. "Finally I just sat on the bed with them and they forgot I was there," he recalls.

Mariella (left), one of the addicts Richards photographed for *Cocaine True*, *Cocaine Blue*, lived in a dank, windowless basement apartment in the desolate East New York section of Brooklyn, allowing other addicts to shoot up there in exchange for drugs. Using Mariella's apartment as a base, Richards made the contacts that proved crucial to his story.

The image here depicts Mariella's face as she "ties up" her junk-ravaged arm in search of a usable vein. Sitting in the kitchen with her as she "slammed the bent needle over and over again into her arm," Richards felt revulsion, and snapped the picture — taken about two inches from her face — in an effort to distract himself.

The shot, which Richards says captures "the depth of her addiction, the desperate, awful need for drugs," leaves him conflicted. Having grown fond of her, he doesn't want people to see Mariella as just "a freak with a needle." But he does concede that "she was a hard-core addict and would be forever — no matter what anyone did for her."

William McGowan is writing a book about identity politics and the press.



The cast (also the crew) of "The Ride." Below: On a disability-rights demonstration in "When Billy Broke His Head . . ."

For the growing genre of camcorder journalism, nothing is too personal

by Pat Aufderheide



It is a small but growing part of the televisual landscape, showing up on everything from public-access cable to *Nightline*. Its practitioners range from teen-age chroniclers to video artists to veteran reporters. And as it grows, it gives rise to tough questions about applying accepted journalistic standards to innately subjective reporting.

The subject is personal journalism by camcorder. It is still a marginal player in television, known to most of the public only through the silliness of *America's Funniest Home Videos* or the sensationalism of shows like *I Witness Video* or the choreographed realism of *Cops* and its ilk. But indeed so-called small-format video is growing, and its potential is vast. That is partly because camcorders themselves are spreading like locusts; more than a fifth of American households have them and more than three million are sold each year, according to the Electronic Industries Association.

Will the camcorder become a widely used tool for ordinary people to tell not-so-ordinary stories to a broad audience, showing us American realities we might not otherwise have been allowed to visit? Will

the genre largely circumvent the traditional middlemen of journalism, letting people tell their own stories their own way? Consider these recent documentaries, all produced through public television outlets. Each is told from the grass roots with the help of camcorders:

Six teen-agers from different ethnic backgrounds pile into a van, recording their encounters with dope, death, and other young people in cities from places like Dayton, Ohio, to Albuquerque, New Mexico (*The Ride*).

A brain-damaged man in Minneapolis encounters disability-rights activists — and discovers a more positive self-image — on camera (*When Billy Broke His Head . . . and Other Tales of Wonder*).

A young Vietnamese immigrant finds America's mean streets and even meaner prisons (*Bui Doi Life Like Dust*).

In each case, the subject is encountered up close and personal, at the same time evoking social experience that is rarely seen on commercial television.

In *The Ride*, for instance, when a vivacious

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African-American teen-ager named Paula Patton decides to interview white high school students near the Pine Ridge, South Dakota, reservation about white-Indian tensions, her choice of subject — race — is both topical and personal. It becomes even more so when, in Dayton, she stoically endures a drunk's racist ranting as the production team walks down a street at night. In *When Billy Broke His Head*, Billy Golfus, brain-damaged since a motor-scooter accident, records a meeting with a Medicaid bureaucrat that frustrates them both — the bureaucrat is patient, decent, and unhelpful — and makes real Billy's description of the petty humiliations of a disabled day.

Small-format video will be the staple of a new TV series in development called *E.C.U.*, for "extreme close up." *E.C.U.*, which producer Ellen Schneider will soon start pitching to potential distributors, wants to be the first TV series to showcase first-person stories of unsung America. The idea derived from her work on the public TV series *P.O.V.* — Point of View — which is dedicated to social-issue documentaries. It was on *P.O.V.* in 1993 that *Silverlake Life* became a surprise hit.

The film was begun by Tom Joslin, a filmmaker and film teacher, with the help of his lover Mark Massi. It recounts their last days; both died of AIDS. (The project was finished

covered when she was twenty-five that she had DES-related cancer. (Her mother when pregnant had taken DES, a drug that has been conclusively linked to cancer in the daughters of women who took it.) Over the last five years since her diagnosis, she has filmed her family's process of adjustment.

At one point in the mass of tape she has accumulated, her mother breaks down and runs away from the camera, sobbing, "Why does everyone have to see our pain?" But even this was taped and archived, Helfand said, because she was determined that their pain not be a private experience, but serve a purpose: to contribute to an informed public discussion of "the long-term, complex effect of reproductive technologies in our lives."

Pam Walton, a lesbian who is part of a close community developed over twenty-five years in San Francisco and whose father is a militant right-wing activist who denounces homosexuality, wanted to use the camera to re-establish a relationship, perhaps even to undergo an emotional healing process. She also thought her story touched on larger issues of the meaning of family and community.

E.C.U. is far from alone in the first-person-video documentary field. U.S. public TV's main outlet for experiment is the Independent Television Service (ITVS), set up by Congress in 1989 to encourage imaginative programming.

Vernacular Video

by their former student and friend, Peter Friedman.) The camera goes with Tom to, for instance, the drugstore, where he discovers he no longer has the strength to pull a plastic bucket out of the stacked pile. It travels back to earlier home movies to define his relationship to his parents. It follows Tom through his dying moments, until Mark closes Tom's eyes.

The film won rave reviews, prompted hundreds of letters from viewers, and led *P.O.V.* to solicit home-videotaped comments that became a regular "Talk Back" feature on *P.O.V.* episodes.

"What *Silverlake Life* did," Schneider recalls, "was to put AIDS in the context of a whole human life. So it made connections beyond the AIDS community. We got letters from relatives of cancer patients who connected with it, and from youngsters who said, 'I didn't know homosexuals love each other.' For many people, the whole question of AIDS changed forever."

And now, Schneider thinks, TV journalism might be changed forever. To assess the grass-roots appetite for making personal, point-of-view video, *E.C.U.* announced in film and video circles that it would hold a series of workshops around the country, where aspiring personal journalists could brainstorm the emerging form. Hundreds of people applied to attend the workshops, which were free, and sixty-six were accepted. Some, like Judith Helfand, were eager to tell intensely intimate yet socially revealing stories to a broadcast audience. Helfand, an independent film producer, dis-

ITVS says personal-essay proposals now make up the largest category of submissions. Britain's BBC in 1990 began a series, *Video Diaries*, featuring a different person's story each week. (Storytellers tape their own work, but get extensive help in editing.) The show was so popular that *Teenage Diaries* was inaugurated in 1992.

Small-format video is also an opportunity for social activists who want to increase the variety of points of view on television. The veteran filmmaker Ilan Ziv (*Palestinian Diaries*; *Family Scenes*, *Stones and M16s* [Jewish settler diaries]) long ago abandoned his free-lance work for the BBC and others to work with nonprofessionals who wanted to tell their own stories. A recent project, with Peter Kinoy, was *Teen Dreams* — three interwoven stories of poor, inner-city U.S. teen-agers.

"What's interesting to me," says Kinoy, whose other credits include *When the Mountains Tremble*, about the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Guatemalan Indian activist Rigoberta Menchú, "is the idea of people having a public voice they wouldn't have in any other way, a voice that is not totally decided upon by an outsider."

Some journalists are concerned that video diarists and storytellers may not play by rules that have been painstakingly carved out over the last few decades among professional journalists.

Ellen Hume, a former *Wall Street Journal* reporter who is now a senior fellow in the Annenberg Washington Program,

thinks the advent of vernacular video is "a plus for artistic and democratic reasons, because journalism as practiced by the established institutions is very narrow." On the other hand, she argues, it may never have been more important for journalists to clarify the ethical parameters of their work.

Indeed, the point-of-view perspective of personal video, fueled as it is by passion and sometimes advocacy, can be the antithesis of traditional expectations of balance and objectivity. Frequently videomakers make no claim to objectivity or even to journalism as they understand it. "I don't do journalism, and I don't do windows," growls Golfus, a former National Public Radio free-lancer. He says he simply wants to be seen as an individual with an argument affecting public life.

Fraud is a concern to some editors. "How do you stop the video Janet Cooke?" *Newsday's* Howard Schneider asked Ellen Schneider at a Neiman Foundation conference on new technologies and journalism. He was referring to a scandal in which *The Washington Post* discovered that a Pulitzer Prize-winning story had been fudged. "What are your checks and balances?"

Ellen Schneider says fraud was not a major concern in her work because she works with storytellers over months and even years. Says Tom Weinberg, who produced fifty-two hour-long anthologies of often-quirky feature news items in the PBS series *The '90s*, "Ninety-nine percent of the people who take pictures with video cameras are doing it because they're interested in what they're shooting. They're not trying to fool anybody." It's the programmer's job — and it's not hard, he says — to sniff out the one percent. "Worry about the professionals — look at *Forrest Gump* and see what they can do with electronic airbrushing."

Schneider herself raises another question. "Where is that fine line between expressing an opinion and declaring a fact? For example, if someone in *Silverlake Life* had said AZT simply does not work, do we have responsibility to clarify that, or do we assume that the public will understand that this is simply an opinion expressed by an individual?"

Professionals who shape personal video push to find the narrative in the same way as more traditional producers. David Simpson, co-producer and co-director of *When Billy Broke His Head*, worked at it until he could see the program as a road movie. *Silverlake Life's* Tom Joslin seemed always conscious of the requirements of the narrative. A dramatic scene in which he bursts into rage after visiting a doctor was self-recorded twice, apparently because he was unhappy with the technical quality the first time.

This polishing of fact is not new to TV journalists. But it raises the same question — when does polishing turn fact into fiction? — that it does in mainstream professional journalism.

A reporter's relationship with sources, a longstanding journalistic concern, is particularly urgent in vernacular video where sources are often the reporter's own immediate family. Pam Walton, the San Francisco lesbian, was finally able to convince her ultraconservative father to meet with her and says the meeting may have opened up new and hopeful possibilities for their relationship. She's now worried about his reception of the finished video. "He knows

I'm making it, and he knows he's in it," she says. "But he doesn't realize he's the antihero."

A more immediate problem than ethics in vernacular video is finding it at all on the small screen. *Teen Dreams*, largely financed by European TV, will first be seen in this country in theaters. Personal documentaries are most likely to be found on low-rating public television.

Even the small-format work done by experienced journalists since the early '70s has had trouble finding a home in mainstream TV. Jon Alpert, for example, has gone to Cuba, Vietnam, Iraq, and China with portable equipment and a distinctive style sometimes called "direct video." (See "Jon Alpert: Odd Man Out," *CJR*, September/October 1991). But he did not find the networks exactly receptive.

Still, changing economic patterns — a proliferation of television outlets, for one, and the search for low-budget programming, for another — have loosened, if only slightly, the grip of the networks. Camcorder work by journalists shows up on local news channels like New York 1 and in some smaller-market stations, and it has become a staple of the investigative dramas of *20/20*, *60 Minutes*, *48 Hours*, and other programs.

Last July *Nightline* ran an entire half-hour documentary, done with a small-format camera, chronicling a week in the life of a small Haitian town. A former *60 Minutes* journalist, David Turecamo, had gone free-lance with his own lightweight equipment. To place the story, he worked with Video News International (VNI), an organization that employs some thirty camcorder-armed journalists — many of them also stringers for radio or magazines — around the world, and now sells to the top-of-the-line network newsmagazines. And *Nightline* was delighted to get a piece that, as producer Kathryn Kross said, got "closer to the source of real people and real stories." Turecamo's credentials were an important professional guarantee for her.

Michael Rosenblum, founder of VNI, thinks established reporters are the best pioneers of small-format journalism, and he expects them to adhere rigorously to existing standards and styles.

The genre could rapidly gain in popularity with the expansion of channel-surfing options and new interactive opportunities. Ed Fouhy, director of the Pew Center for Civic Journalism, believes that the multiplying of channels with digital compression and the evolution of the information superhighway will "tremendously weaken the gatekeeper function" of traditional journalism.

Says Bill Kovach, head of the Neiman Foundation: "There's a danger if the information channels become clogged with subjective, opinionated information designed to take you to one opinion or the other. When you take journalistic judgment out of it, you can leave people at sea about what, if anything, it means and what, if anything, they can or should be doing about it. And that is destructive to a democratic system."

America's new storytellers are rediscovering the problems that journalists have long confronted. And they may have much to gain from a creative collaboration with the people who have learned to love their role as America's informational gatekeepers — if both can leap over large cultural gaps. ♦

Newt Gingrich's Frankenstein

Newt Gingrich's defiance of the elements to win control of the House of Representatives in November coincided with the theatrical release of *Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. And, fittingly, there are parallels between the two tales. Gingrich, a brash iconoclast, can be cast as the scientist-creator. The role of his monster — the pathetic beast who does not know his own strength, can kill anything in its grasp, and ultimately turns on its maker — is reserved for the press.

Capitol Hill was once a remarkably courtly news beat. The climate was civil even during the great struggles over minority rights and Vietnam and after relations between press corps and White House had grown bitter. Congressional scandal stories (Wayne Hayes, Wilbur Mills) were the exception, not the rule.

Enter Newt Gingrich, the man who, as Suzanne Garment put it in her book *Scandal*, "brought scandal politics unmistakably home to the Congress." Even as a junior House member in the early '80s, he saw visions of the Speakership and had a strategy for getting there. Among other things, it required infusing those staid congressional reporters with a blood lust. The frontal lobe of a pit bull had to be sutured, figuratively speaking, onto the brain of a gentleman, and this new creature aimed at the Dems. How was this accomplished? With the idea of "corruption." Contrary to stereotype, the typical reporter is surprisingly passive. But, given a whiff of impropriety, a jolt of accusation, his eyes twitch, his limbs quiver ("It's alive, Igor! IT'S ALIVE!"), and he lurches from the slab.

In his book *The Ambition and the Power*, John M. Barry describes how Gingrich performed his surgical feat. His aim was to create "resonance" — a pervasive perception among press and public that Democrats, particularly House Speaker Jim Wright, were crooked. Gingrich was short on evidence but long on persistence and rhetorical pyrotechnics. There was a circularity to his onslaught. Barry describes Gingrich walking into *The Miami Herald* in 1987 and persuading reporter Tom Fiedler to join the fray: "Fiedler's story quoted Gingrich's now-routine comment that Wright was the most corrupt Speaker in the twentieth century, and some variations: 'Wright is so consumed by his own power that he is like Mussolini . . . We have overwhelming evidence that he is a genuinely bad man . . .' The article added, 'Gingrich said his charges are based on numerous news accounts.' Many of those news accounts Gingrich had generated."

Wright resigned when an ethics panel disclosed evidence of possible violations on a book deal and other matters. But Barry concluded that Wright, operating just within the margins of propriety, was felled as much by the embarrassing din of publicity as anything else.

Encouraged by the Gingrich machine, reporters took up not only the House post office scandal (a serious matter) but also

the House bank overdraft affair. This was minor, involving no tax money, but they played it like another Teapot Dome. Unpaid House restaurant lunch bills of certain members became another Abscam. And so it went until the country, pining for change, dumped the Dems and put Gingrich in as Speaker.

But the monster did not return to its lair. Instead it went after its creator. CBS's Eric Engberg called Gingrich "bombastic and ruthless" and said his record is "filled with contradictions: the family values candidate who divorced his ailing first wife, the avowed enemy of dirty politics who bounced twenty-two checks at the House bank." NBC's Tom Brokaw reported that Gingrich had complained "stridently about the Washington elite [but] flew thousands of miles on jets provided by corporate friends." *The Boston Globe* called him "Newtron bomb."

CNN's Bob Franken called him "militant and outrageous" and countless publications weighed in with the label "bomb-thrower." NPR reporter Sunni Khalid said on C-SPAN that Gingrich was seeking "a more scientific, a more civil way of lynching people." ABC's Jim Wooten described Gingrich as "the national poster boy for the politics of resentment and rage."

Responding to the onslaught, Gingrich froze out *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and ABC News over coverage he particularly disliked and complained of a "constant, unending barrage of distortion," an obsessive media quest for "conservative populist hypocrisy."

He attributed his treatment to liberal bias. But that can only explain so much. My theory is that journalists castigating Gingrich because they saw something of themselves in him. They regarded the kind of attacks that propelled him to prominence as reckless (e.g., his assertion that up to one fourth of the White House staff used drugs) but they couldn't resist trumpeting those charges themselves. Then, after helping throw bombs, they assuaged their guilt by lambasting him as a bomber. (This pattern again evokes *Frankenstein*. In the book, scientist and monster grow to despise each other, which can be interpreted as a kind of self-hatred. As critic Harold Bloom put it, "the monster and his creator are the antithetical halves of a single being.")

What now? There usually is a honeymoon. But given Gingrich's sharp tongue and volatility, and the questions involving his tax-exempt foundation, I would not be surprised to see *Return of Frankenstein* before long. Perhaps even *Son of Frankenstein*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Life Partner of Frankenstein*. Anyone for popcorn?

Christopher Hanson

Christopher Hanson is Washington correspondent for the Seattle Post-Intelligencer and a contributing editor of CJR. Videotapes were provided by the Media Research Center in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Gatekeepers or the Barbarians?

In the last issue of CJR, this column discussed the potential that new media may hold for a golden age of journalism, one unleashed from the constrictions of time or the newshole.

Presuming — and this is no minor presumption — that multimedia journalism becomes widespread, just who will research and collect and display this unprecedented wealth of information — this combination of video, text, photographs, animations, graphics, voice, and who knows what else? Will it be computer wizards? Cyberspace entrepreneurs? Librarians?

The fact is, it had better be journalists.

The best journalists — I have been lucky enough to know many of them over the last three generations — share a common denominator: they trust only what they dig up themselves. They insist on always seeing things firsthand, on taking nobody's word for anything, on approaching everything and everyone skeptically. They assume a missionary's role: they must protect their public from the charlatans.

Many of those superior journalists reacted with disdain and distrust a generation ago when people called researchers set foot in newsrooms. But researchers quickly proved to be of immense value in finding information, so most journalists welcomed their help. And journalists still controlled what to look for, how to recognize it, and what to do with it. They provided the critical element — news judgment.

Now, as new forms of media emerge, good journalists will again need to adapt to new kinds of help while still insisting that in the broad sense, no one else can do their job for them.

That means that remaining a superior journalist is about to become umpteen times harder than it has been. But if good journalists fail to take on this new and formidable challenge, the computer whizzes and champions of glitz may in effect capture journalism and become the real masters of the universe of media in an ever-blossoming media age. The stakes are enormous. Advertising revenues for daily newspapers alone in 1994 were expected to total about \$34 billion, and for all media \$90 billion.

The fact is, the new computer entrepreneurs are itching for the existing, dedicated journalistic entrepreneurs to leave an opening.

Among those itchy fellows is one named Bill Gates. His breathless little company, the Microsoft Corporation, not long ago hired a former journalist as its director of news. Likewise, Bell Atlantic, Pacific Bell, AT&T, Telecommunications, Inc., Viacom, you name it, are all now waiting and watching and getting ready.

What will the good journalists need to learn to ensure that they are the ones doing the journalism that underlies those big bucks?

They will need to know what's available out there in

cyberspace; to know what's appropriate to link to the subject on which they're reporting; to know how to find it, and link it, and display it. To know how to structure stories in new ways that take advantage of this new blend of media forms.

Here's an example:

We are covering the O.J. Simpson case. The issue becomes the reliability of the testing of deoxyribonucleic acid — the macromolecule known as DNA. Instead of just reporting the surface (what's said in court, what this or that expert says in a short quote or even shorter soundbite, etc.), we can show our public how the testing of DNA actually happens. We can assemble a series of stories ranging from the very simplest inverted pyramid model, six or eight paragraphs long, to (just click here) stories mixed with graphics and full-motion video that allow our audience to take its time and in effect see documentaries and peer through microscopes and scanners and read dozens and dozens of articles. Instead of just listening to sound bites from this or that expert, our readers/viewers will be able to *see* and *hear* actual interviews in full at a pace at which they want to read and hear and absorb. For those who want the surface, it is there. Those who want to pursue more deeply can do that, just as far as they wish.

I started doing a bit of research into DNA in cyberspace the other day. I used one of the browsing devices for what passes for an information superhighway right now — the Internet — and simply specified the three letters DNA. Within five seconds, my computer screen was displaying the titles of hundreds of recent articles about DNA from a broad range of publications. I started reading one article after another — researching a story the “old” way in the last quarter of this century.

The difference is that with the tools now available, I can bring relevant parts of this research into my new media story, and flag them by little icons (click here) where appropriate. The parts that are so flagged may lead to photographs, animations, video, sounds, interviews, etc., which can pop on the screen if and when the reader/viewer/listener designates.

This new journalism ought to be able to demystify complex subjects, subjects even as complex as DNA matching.

So back to the question, who will control this process? Will it be men and women like those who run the best of today's journalistic enterprises, people steeped in a tradition of journalistic goals, of public service and of commitment? Or will it be people with more limited priorities, mainly a nice chunk of those billions of dollars?

Stephen D. Isaacs

Stephen D. Isaacs is a professor and associate dean of Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism and co-chair of the university's Center for New Media.

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Spring 1995

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February 15

Moderator:

Caribbean Boat People: Mass Refugee Flows and U.S. Policy

Pamela Falk, Senior Fellow, Caribbean Cultural Center

March 1

Moderator:

The Politics of Russia's Economic Transition

Robert Legvold, Professor of Political Science, Columbia University

March 22

Moderator:

South Africa: Difficult Transition from Sanctions to Development

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April 5

Moderator:

Trade, Foreign investment and Human Rights in China

Richard Dicker, Assistant Counsel, Human Rights Watch

April 19

Moderator:

Population Control and Women's Rights

Stephen L. Isaacs, Professor of Public Health, Columbia University

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Moderator:

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The Reuter Forum, sponsored by the Reuter Foundation, is held from 5 to 7 p.m. in the World Room at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, 116th Street & Broadway, New York City.

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The Scarlet W

by James Boylan

Whitewater has tested the proposition stated nearly a century and a half ago by the orator Wendell Phillips: "We live under a government of men and morning newspapers." Phillips spoke in a time when editorial writing was considered the height of the journalistic art; it has since been in a long decline and investigative reporting has become newspapers' political weapon of choice. But Whitewater has reawakened the obsolescent editorial page. Investigative reporting — half enterprise and half leak — came first, of course, carrying the issue to its place near the top of the national political agenda. When the editorial pages joined in, it was clear that they were again trying to engage in serious business — seeking to weigh in the balance the fate of an administration, to defend the morality of government, to illuminate the destiny of the nation, and indeed to become the Fourth Branch rather than a mere twig.

Chief among those seeking to play the Thunderer (the ancient appellation for the *Times* of London, presumably for the awesome rumble of its arguments) were two of the nation's largest dailies, *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times*. The *Journal's* editorial page has been the domain

James Boylan, founding editor of CJR, wrote studies of corruption in the Franklin D. Roosevelt and Truman administrations for the House of Representatives Watergate inquiry.



In search of sin: Robert L. Bartley, editorial page editor of *The Wall Street Journal*

for more than two decades of Robert L. Bartley, who has been called the most influential editorial writer in America and, *sotto voce*, the most intransigent. The *Times* challenger is Howell Raines, whose term on the editorial page began, coincidentally, with the start of the Clinton administration. Raines's most recent book is the ruminative *Fly Fishing Through the Midlife Crisis*

(1993); Bartley's is a no-nonsense defense of Reaganomics, *The Seven Fat Years* (1992). Raines, a native of Alabama, made his way into journalism by reporting the civil rights struggle and then worked his way up at the *Times* via the Washington bureau, eventually winning a Pulitzer for a feature article about a beloved black family servant. Bartley, an Iowan by birth, scarcely glanced at reporting before moving to the *Journal* editorial page in 1964 and becoming its head, at the age of thirty-three, in 1972. He won his Pulitzer, for editorial writing, in 1980. Above all, Raines and Bartley are known by convenient tags — one a southern liberal, the other

A JOURNAL BRIEFING: WHITEWATER

FROM THE EDITORIAL PAGES OF THE WALL STREET JOURNAL
EDITED BY ROBERT L. BARTLEY
WITH MICAH MORRISON AND THE EDITORIAL PAGE STAFF.
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL. 586 PP. \$14.95.

one a champion of conservatism. Between them, it seemed, there could be no common ground — but they converged on Whitewater.

The issue reached public attention by a course as long and twisting as that of the White River, along which lay the 230 wooded acres that were

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the original holding of the Whitewater Development Company. The purchasers, in 1978, were two couples — James B. McDougal, a speculator-politico, and his wife, Susan McDougal; and Bill Clinton, state attorney general, soon-to-be governor, and his wife, Hillary Rodham, a soon-to-be partner in Little Rock's Rose Law Firm. Over the years, the Arkansas press gave only routine attention to the largely inactive Whitewater enterprise, or to the Whitewater company's accounts at the rickety savings-and-loan, Madison Guaranty, that McDougal bought in 1982. In 1989, Madison Guaranty, like many others of its kind, was closed by federal regulators, having recklessly lent itself into bankruptcy.

The Great Whitewater Fiasco, by the veteran journalist Martin L. Gross (Ballantine, \$10), gives a good account of how Whitewater emerged from obscurity: early in 1992, Jeff Gerth of the *Times*, looking into the finances of the prospective Democratic candidate, produced a story that is now recognized for better or worse as the ur-text of Whitewater journalism. A momentary spark of interest — marked by one editorial in the *Times* and a question or two from a rival candidate, Jerry Brown — faded after the Clinton campaign got friendly accountants to announce that Whitewater never amounted to much and had lost money besides.

But the story, which appeared on March 8, 1992, lit a long fuse. Its references to Madison Guaranty caught the eye of the Resolution Trust Corporation, created to deal with the fallout of failed thrifts. RTC investigators began to poke around in what was left of Madison Guaranty's records, in a warehouse in Little Rock. In September 1992, during the campaign, the RTC forwarded a criminal referral — a request for investigation of mishandling of Whitewater and other accounts — to the Bush administration's Justice Department, which did nothing.

But the RTC persisted. In the fall of 1993 the new Clinton administration was informed internally that multiple

Whitewater
ends up meaning,
Humpty Dumpty-
style, just what
the *Journal* chooses
it to mean, nothing
more nor less

referrals were on the way, possibly naming the Clintons as witnesses or beneficiaries of criminal activity. To insure that these referrals would stay afloat, "there were leaks out of the RTC to newspapers and to [Representative] James Leach, [an] Iowa Republican," as Elizabeth Drew notes in her new chronicle, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (Simon & Schuster, \$24). The new referrals arrived at the Justice Department early in October 1993; within days Gerth and other reporters were on the phones looking for confirmation, and near the end of the month *The Washington Post* reported that investigators were interested in finding out whether accounts held at Madison Guaranty, including Whitewater, had served as a cash machine for Arkansas politicians.

A new flurry of stories lasted into December; they were followed by the revelation that turned Whitewater into a media frenzy — that Whitewater papers had been secretly taken from the office of Vincent W. Foster, the White House aide who died of self-inflicted gunshot wounds in July 1993. That news broke on Monday, December 20, called by Drew "the most bizarre day thus far in this and perhaps any other administration," and with reason. Consider the list: *The Washington Times* offered the story about the Whitewater files under the headline CLINTON PAPERS LIFTED AFTER AIDE'S SUICIDE. Arkansas state troopers charged that they had served as Clinton's sexual secret service. The nominee for secretary of defense was

revealed as a social-security scofflaw. And the son of the surgeon general was arrested on drug charges.

In this increasingly fevered setting, the editorial pages tuned up. On December 15, *The Wall Street Journal* presented its first editorial dealing specifically with Whitewater. It was called "Arkansas Anxieties." To emphasize its weight, the editorial carried a label, "On Ethics," superimposed on a drawing of a brooding Lincoln statue. The *Journal* averred that it had previously stood to one side of "the fray," but now discerned not only a "narrow issue of scandal" but the possibility that "Arkansas mores," a term of condemnation that the *Journal* had already found of great utility, had come to infect Washington.

Five days later the *Times* editorial page took up Whitewater with an imperative: "Open Up on Madison Guaranty." The editorial summarized Gerth's revelations to that point and politely but fretsomely called on the president to "clear the air."

Thus began an extended period of dueling editorial pages — that is, of almost alternating editorials sounding the same melody but with different styles — the *Times* jazzier than usual, the *Journal* definitely rococo. Moreover, there was an unaccustomed spirit of harmony between Forty-third and Liberty streets. The *Journal* referred repeatedly and favorably to Gerth's stories, and the *Times* reciprocated in its business pages with a profile of Bartley under the flattering headline A CONSERVATIVE'S STAR SOARS ON WORDS ABOUT WHITEWATER, to which a *Journal* editorial responded in a courtly manner that "*The New York Times* has been both good on Whitewater and elsewhere recently generous to us."

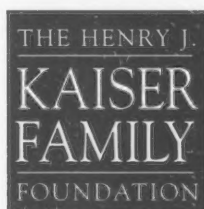
An era of good feelings, indeed, and of near-obsession with Whitewater on both editorial pages. Between the onset in December 1993 and mid-August 1994, when the year's Whitewater congressional hearings ended, the *Journal* ran fifty Whitewater-related editorials that are included in its collection. In the same period, the *Times* printed at least forty editorials

mentioning Whitewater. That is, those who had the stamina to read both papers had available an average of a Whitewater editorial every other day for six months.

For those who may have shirked their duty of reading *The Wall Street Journal* editorial pages religiously, *A Journal Briefing: Whitewater* lays out between covers everything that the *Journal* claims as part of its Whitewater effort. In his introduction, Bartley notes: "The swirling story is surely confusing to the

public. Even the most informed and literate citizens understandably have trouble following the twists and turns and the personalities so fascinating to the cognoscenti." But, he writes, never fear: "This collection is designed to provide a factual base and develop themes that advance understanding and illuminate outstanding questions. A reader who reviews the chronicle here will understand what has happened so far, and be alert and prepared for future turns in the tale."

Indeed, it is a veritable encyclopedia,



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with the title subject stretched as far and as thin as a water-filled balloon. Some of the topics have no discernible connection with Whitewater as such: among them, Paula Corbin Jones, who has sued the president for harassment, turns up in nine different places; and Hillary Clinton's Health Care Task Force is damned as a "cheap and duplicitous publicity stunt" but no relevance to Whitewater is claimed.

More typically, the collection hints at Whitewater connections without substantiating them. It discusses the

Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) scandal, but sees nothing more substantial than "speculative but still possible connections [to] Whitewater." There is repeated reference to the conspiracy theories centering on the airport at Little Rock, Arkansas, purportedly a Reagan-era shipping point for exporting arms and importing drugs — a welter, according to an article by Micah Morrison of the *Journal's* editorial page, of "smuggling, . . . covert operations, money laundering,

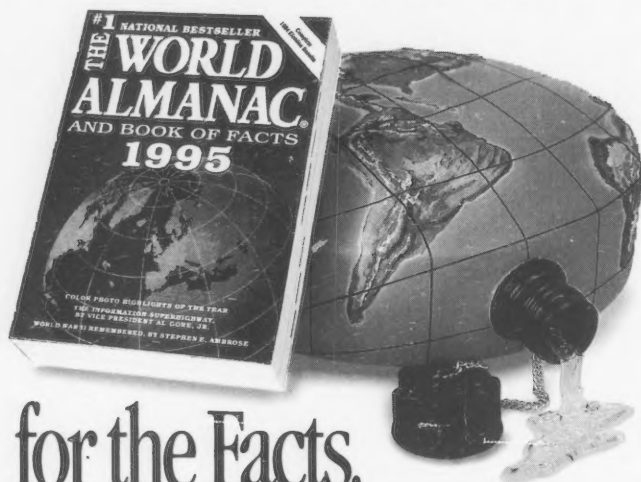
and murder." Later Morrison asks: "But what, if anything, does Mena have to do with Whitewater?" His answer is: "Certainly, something was going on at Mena . . ." (The *Times* is just not up to speed on this sort of thing; it has mentioned Mena primarily as the headquarters of the American Rock Garden Society.)

Not all of the collection is of such dubious relevance, of course. It includes not only unsigned editorials but signed articles by columnists and editorial-page assistants as well as a dozen news stories that — most of them — throw at least refracted light on Whitewater. (The inclusion of the news stories reportedly provoked complaints by the news side, which has often been reported to be at odds with editorial, spiritually and factually.) At the collection's heart are the unsigned editorials and the brief articles signed by the editor, Bartley.

The editorials' major refrain emerged months before Whitewater — that to be from Arkansas and in the administration was to be under suspicion. One White House aide, Patsy Thomasson, is usually named with a reminder that her former boss, Don Lasater, an Arkansas bond dealer and Clinton supporter, was a "drug convict," although, factually speaking, the *Journal* can hang nothing worse on Thomasson herself than dilatory handling of White House passes. Starting in March 1993, the page presented a periodic series of "Who Is . . . ?" editorials, directed with a single exception at Arkansans. The most frequent target was Webster Hubbell, associate attorney general and a former partner in the Rose Law Firm, the subject of six "Who Is . . . ?" essays and a "Who Was . . . ?" when he left Washington under the cloud of being accused by Rose of having enriched himself by overbilling clients. But the scrutiny had nothing to do with the crimes to which Hubbell later pleaded guilty; his fault in the *Journal's* eyes was that he was too political and too close to the White House.

The most celebrated "Who Is . . . ?" was directed at Vincent Foster, another former Rose partner; this editorial, on

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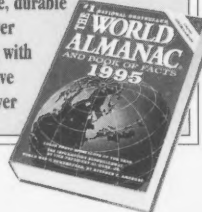
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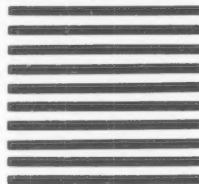
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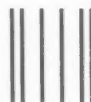
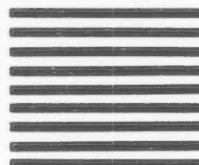
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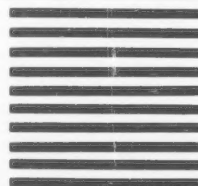
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June 17, 1993, picked a quarrel with him over his refusal to send the *Journal* a photograph of himself. After it was discovered that Foster's torn-up suicide note mentioned the *Journal* and the *Journal* was widely slurred as being implicated in his death, an editorial of August 6, 1993, responded bristlingly. It asserted that Ed Meese, Robert Bork, and Clarence Thomas underwent much worse abuse than Foster, and complained that critics "grabbed the occasion to beat up on us" for Foster's suicide. Far from avoiding the subject of Foster thereafter, Bartley — pre-empting what is usually a prerogative of the news side — filed a Freedom of Information request and eventually went to court to seek release of investigative reports on Foster's death (access so far denied). In a much later article Bartley offers the only fragment of autobiography in these pages: "For my part, I can testify that getting tagged with blame for the Foster suicide powerfully focused my own attention on Whitewater."

That attention swings most often to "Arkansas mores" — that term used so repeatedly to suggest the illegitimacy and the corruption of Arkansas political culture and by extension the illegitimacy and corruption of the Clinton administration. Invoking "culture" is, from an editorial writer's point of view, an ideal tool; it is all but unanswerable, an argument that is beyond argument.

The quintessential *Journal* Whitewater editorial is that of March 21, 1994, headed with the Ciceronian cry of anguish, "O Tempora! O Mores!" (followed by an English translation: "*Oh the times! The mores!*"). The essay bears down on Hillary Clinton's commodity profits; on trading in stock of a fishing corporation by Arkansas investors, including Patsy Thomasson (who is again identified as "former associate of drug convict Dan Lasater"); on the secretary of agriculture, for going easy on Arkansas's Tyson Foods Inc.; on the Rose Law Firm; and on a catalog of sins venial and otherwise: Whitewater, White House passes, Hubbell's overbillings, the flap over the White

House travel staff, the Foster case, Zoe Baird, Kimba Wood, Lani Guinier, Bobby Inman, and finally one Chris Emery, "a White House usher dismissed over phone conversations with Barbara Bush . . ."

"Whitewater," the editorial concludes, "is not merely about a land deal, it is about all these things, and about the place they are bidding to assume in Washington, which God knows is guilty of enough sins of its own. Above all it is about hypocrisy. . . . Lay aside all suspicions and accept every cover story.

We are now supposed to believe Bill Clinton was elected President to reform the sins of the high-flying 1980s?" This is as close as the *Journal* comes to eloquence (or outright clarity), but it is a mean eloquence, directed not at Whitewater in any commonsense definition of the term, or at reform or amelioration, but at the discrediting of a president.

The impression given by this meandering collection is that the Whitewater enterprise itself, which is never really explained comprehensively

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U N I V E R S I T Y

after the editorial "Whitewater: A Primer" of December 28, 1993, did not as such deeply engage the editorial mind. This impression is confirmed in the index, which has less than two and a half inches devoted to Whitewater in thirty-seven pages. Whitewater ends up meaning, Humpty Dumpty style, just what the *Journal* chooses it to mean, neither more nor less.

This elasticity permits the *Journal's* editorialists to use Whitewater to concoct a strange, dark, near-criminal world of illicit connections, covert influence, and, in an almost puritan sense, sin. In this context, Clinton's alleged radicalism, a constant target of Rush Limbaugh and his ilk, is not even mentioned. The topic is sin, and that's what the *Journal* is agin — so much so that one is left wondering whether this is indeed the Clinton administration, or Caligula's.

Lined up for inspection via Nexis, the *Times* editorials in the first half of 1994 do not wander so far afield as the *Journal's*, nor are they so embittered. While the *Journal's* stance seems to be that of an observer on the shore smiling

grimly as the ship takes on water, the *Times* keeps suggesting ways to bail, even when the ship is listing sixty-five degrees. The *Times* directs the Clintons to turn over the Whitewater records, and they do so. It urges a special counsel, and one is eventually appointed. But mere policy does not ease the itch. There is deep exasperation that the administration has failed to live up to what the editorial page chooses to call "the normal protocols of governance."

Starting on February 27, the tone changes from testy advice to outrage. Commenting on the "boneheaded conclave" called by Deputy Treasury Secretary Roger Altman to warn White House officials about the RTC investigation, the editorial page reached for an ultimate political insult: "The Clinton team has taken the nation back to the sham ethics of the early Reagan Administration." On March 4, it cast an even more deadly aspersion: that in permitting meetings about the RTC investigation the Clinton administration was "easily the most reckless in interfering with the integrity of Federal investigative agencies since that of

Richard Nixon." Of Clinton himself, it adds, "Of course, punishing the incompetent and asserting firm conflict-of-interest principles requires a President who is dedicated to evenhanded justice. So far there is scant evidence of those qualities."

In the end, the *Times* too resorts to blaming culture. The climactic editorial in this vein — the parallel to the *Journal's* "O Tempora! O Mores!" — is "Arkansas Secrets," March 31, 1994. After reviewing Gerth's Whitewater findings and Hillary Clinton's commodities speculation, the editorial condemns what it calls "The Arkansas Defense": "A central argument is that while the Clintons' dealings were not pretty, you cannot apply the standards of the outside world to Arkansas, where a thousand or so insiders run things in a loosey-goosey way that may look unethical or even illegal to outsiders. This logic holds that whatever the Clintons did was penny-ante stuff that the Republicans and the press ought to be willing to overlook in service to the higher national interests." Of course, this is the culture theme with a difference; where the *Journal* uses Arkansas culture as a term of condemnation, the *Times* merely condemns its use as an excuse.

Even though they slightly pulled their punches, the *Times* editorials were so tough and apparently so out of character with previous perceptions that they became the subject of a *New Yorker* article by Peter J. Boyer ("The Howell Raines Question," August 22-29, 1994), who offered several possible explanations for them. The most biting was that Raines, a former chief of the Washington bureau, was intent on supporting the bureau's work, as exemplified in Gerth's stories. Another was, of course, culture — that Raines as a southerner was consumed with envy of a southern president; a less banal theory suggested that a kind of moral perfectionism rooted in covering the civil-rights struggle had left him impatient with a less-than-perfect president. For his own part, Raines, rather convincingly, insists that the matter is not personal. The *Times*, he observes coolly, endorsed Clinton and owes him the best advice it can give.

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The common fault of the editorial writing on Whitewater is a failure of perspective

"But in this White House," the final Whitewater editorial before last fall's election says, "it is hard to know if anyone — including the boss, especially the boss — is listening."

More than two years after Jeff Gerth lit the Whitewater fuse with his story in March 1992, Gene Lyons, a writer from Arkansas, has come forward with an elaborate critique designed to show that the story was little more than a hoax, that "most of the insinuations in Gerth's reporting are either highly implausible or demonstrably false." In other words, that Whitewater is not and has never been a legitimate issue. His article, "Fool for Scandal," in the October *Harper's* and the more elaborate documentation he offers in a press kit distributed by the magazine center most of the fire on one aspect of the story: the question of whether Governor Clinton appointed Beverly Bassett Schaffer state securities commissioner as a favor to his Whitewater partner McDougal, so as to keep Madison Guaranty alive with special regulatory handling.

At the least, Lyons demonstrates that Gerth failed to include Schaffer's version of events, although it was easily available. More broadly, he states that Gerth's reporting was tendentious: "*all significant mistakes seem to run in a prosecutorial direction* [italics Lyons's]." Most important, he shows that Gerth did not convincingly clinch his major point — that Clinton, through his commissioner, exerted corrupt influence on the handling of Madison Guaranty.

While the Lyons critiques are worth reading as an intense case study in the crudities and pitfalls of investigative reporting, they do not obliterate the

story. A re-reading of the 1992 original shows that there is a great deal that Lyons lets stand without comment, apparently satisfied that pointing out erroneous details suffices to undercut the whole. But even if all the errors are as charged, there is enough there to arouse suspicion of wrongdoing — or so, at least, the RTC concluded.

A key but understated truth in the Lyons article is his observation that there might never have been a Whitewater issue without the press, without the *Times*, without Gerth. Gerth's first story got the investigation started; the 1993 follow-up stories set up the clamor for a special counsel. And Lyons is right in resenting the condescension implicit in the harping on Arkansas culture — but in that respect the *Journal* would have been a more appropriate target than the *Times*.

Lyons's implied conclusion is that Whitewater never should have happened, and should not be happening now. But we are far down the road now, and Whitewater has started to accumulate indictments, plea bargains, and congressional inquiries. One can revise, but not repeal, history.

The common fault of the editorial writing on Whitewater in the *Journal* and the *Times* is a failure of perspective. The manner differs — one lectures, the other preaches — but they both insist, implicitly, that Whitewater is very, very important, even when they are not sure just why. As to the historical place of Whitewater in presidential scandals, the *Times* does no better than making bruising references to Reagan and Nixon. The *Journal* has references to Truman — an apt comparison — but merely to his emergence from Kansas City's Pendergast machine, not to the scandals that rippled through his administration, reaching not only through the Internal Revenue Agency but into the White House staff itself, and by my estimate at least somewhat more serious than anything that has yet been proposed in the Whitewater inquiry.

If we are going to have a government in which morning newspapers play a part, the least we can expect of their editorial writers is that they give us



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Dennis F. Giza, Associate Publisher

some perspective on what is important. The indication here is that our two most substantial newspapers got swept up in the firestorm generated in part by their own reporters and simply added fuel. O tempora! O mores!

The Story-Tellers

By Bruce Porter

In the field of nonfiction writing, it's not the style that wins over readers, but the facts — the writer's ability to discover something special in the subject matter that a lesser observer might not divine. That's why teaching students how to write amounts really to teaching them how to report.

William Zinsser, a former newspaper reporter, prolific magazine writer, and author of many books, took note of the distinction when he was asked to give a course in nonfiction writing a couple of years ago at the New School for Social Research in New York City. So, rather than subject his students to those lectures on how to write leads, "billboards," and query letters, he thought instead to bring in eleven accomplished graduates of a similar course he had taught at Yale University and have them explain just what they went after in a story and how they got their stuff. He tape-recorded the sessions and jiggered the transcripts into this book of instruction.

"Come and tell stories," he told his acolytes. "Tell stories about what you do and how you do it, and how you got started, and what experiences you learned from, including your mistakes."

The result, aside from relieving Zinsser of a considerable amount of class preparation, is an entertaining and enlightening companion to his highly praised *On Writing Well*, one that anyone contemplating a career in newspaper or magazine journalism can read with great profit. Arranged in

chapters dealing with such categories as Nature and the Environment, The Sports Beat, and Writing About People, it transmits lessons that one can apply to almost any sort of story.

The most important one he stresses is that good writers need to have fun at what they do to provide readers a good time, too. "It takes audacity, and exuberance, and gaiety, and the most important one is audacity," he quotes from S.J. Perelman. It also takes going your own way on a story instead of keeping up with the pack — zigging, as Jane Mayer of *The Wall Street Journal* puts it, while everyone else is zagging. A White House correspondent who hated her job because it tied her to press briefings, Mayer always looked for opportunities to break away, such as when President Ronald Reagan's advisers arranged a trip to the island of Grenada so he could celebrate the U.S. victory over that benighted little republic with a photo op under swaying palm trees. Mayer went down a week early to dig beneath the p.r. story and came up with an article on how the

SPEAKING OF JOURNALISM

BY WILLIAM ZINSSER
HARPERCOLLINS
182 PP. \$20.

patriotic gesture, considering all the expenses of shipping down the president and his entourage, was going to cost taxpayers between \$3 to \$5 million. Of course, "You can pay a price for this kind of reporting," says Mayer, who was subsequently put on the White House "death list" and for days afterward couldn't even find out the bare details of the president's schedule.

The rule of following your own head holds especially true for newspaper feature writers, who often find themselves prisoners of editors taken with predictable and dull story ideas. When assigned to do a piece about women who sign up for self-defense courses, John Tierney, who reported on science for *Rolling Stone* and other magazines before joining *The New York Times*, sensed that the story here wasn't on the women but on the "model mugger," the pretend rapist in a padded

Bruce Porter, a *CJR* contributing editor, is director of journalism at Brooklyn College and an adjunct professor at Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism.

suit who took all their kicks and punches. Or, sent out to do a color story on the famous championship chess match between Gary Kasparov and Anatoly Karpov, Tierney decided that there wasn't much to be written about two guys sitting silently at a table and chose instead to survey the art of one-upmanship in the field of kibitzing. "Always give yourself an escape," he quotes one kibitzer as saying. "If you're not sure whether a move is good or not, say, 'That's interesting,' or 'That's worth taking a look at.' If it really looks wrong, say, 'I'm not quite sure that's sound.'"

Another valuable lesson when getting an assignment is to track the story down in the history books to enlarge readers' understanding of what's going on today. When Roger Cohn, an environmental writer, now a senior editor of *Audubon*, was assigned a story about a disagreement between two neighboring Indian tribes, the Northern Cheyenne and the Crow, over whether to exploit a coal reserve, he did some library work on the background of the tribes and came up with a fascinating precedent for the dispute. The Cheyenne, who were against despoiling the land to get at the coal, had been the ones who helped wipe out Custer at the Little Bighorn. The Crow, on the other hand, who wanted to strip-mine the coal for ready cash, had served as Custer's scouts.

Then there's the fly-on-the-wall approach, "making no demands other than the right to tag along," says Mark Singer, the *New Yorker* writer and author of *Funny Money*, about the collapse of the Penn Square Bank during the oil bust in Oklahoma. "Sometimes you ask your subject ahead of time, 'I notice that you go every Wednesday to such and such. Could I accompany you there?' knowing it would be a place where you can see him in character. . . ."

Singer also says he took a course in shorthand "because I thought it was important to get dialogue as accurately as possible." And the dialogue he elected to use in his oil book often revealed the subject's personality in just a few words. "Murray started out in

the Bronx, or someplace like it," he wrote about one particular character, "but he had been in Oklahoma enough years so that his monologues contained frequent pauses, which were followed by the statement, 'Now, mister, I'm gonna tell ya somethin',' whereupon he would launch into a parable full of local color and universal implications. When I called him to make a date I would always ask how he was and he would always say, 'Well sir, I'm still short and I'm still chubby.'"

One of the important tips Zinsser's ex-students pass on, albeit not one terribly helpful to writers assigned a less than thrilling subject, is that it's a lot easier to make someone interesting if you choose someone interesting to write about. Here's Singer on the eccentric film maker Errol Morris (*The Thin Blue Line*). "If Morris could find time to finish *Dr. Death*, he might at last tie together an odd melange of material: . . . scenes from lab research on a mammal called the African naked mole rat, archival footage from an Edison silent film called *Electrocuting the Elephant*, and a meditation on Zoar, an extinct utopian community in Ohio. After a trip to Europe, Morris had told me with satisfaction about finding the right music to accompany the Zoar material. . . . 'I'd been hearing this stuff on the radio in Zurich, and then I went into a record store and asked whether they had any liturgical yodeling. They came up with 'Yodeler Messen.' It's, like, based on the idea that God might be hard of hearing.'"

As with anything patched together from tapes, the book reads a little breezily at times and suffers slightly from repetition. It could also have benefited from a tad closer attention by the copy editor to make sure people actually meant what they said. As part of an interesting explanation of how he got material for one story, for instance, John Rosenberg, the editor of *Vermont Magazine*, is quoted thusly: "As it happened, the magazine came out a few days after I had waited to have breakfast with the governor, who had just died of a heart attack."

Say I to my smart-aleck self: Rosenberg must write his stuff without using a lot of direct quotes.

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FELLOWSHIPS IN GERMANY

Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism is again seeking applicants for travel fellowships for American journalists.

The John J. McCloy Fellowships, sponsored by the American Council on Germany, offer programs for American journalists wishing to study and write about Germany. They cover expenses for a three-week trip at any time during the year. Deadline for submitting applications: March 1, 1995.

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SHORT TAKES

SECOND TIME LUCKY

The *Today* show was planning features on each wife and asked permission to follow me. They came along one whole day through New Hampshire, attending coffees and other political events. It was an exhausting day, climaxed by a half-hour interview with Jane Pauley. She was so pretty and sweet-looking — and managed to absolutely devastate me. We had a polite little interview until her last question, which went something like this: "Mrs. Bush, people say your husband is a man of the eighties and you are a woman of the forties. What do you say to that?"

Why didn't she just slap me in the face? She was darn lucky I didn't burst into tears and say that was the worst question I had ever heard! I was speechless and heartsick. The interview was over practically before it started. After she left, while I was still rocking from the question, I told Becky I was sure I hadn't understood her question. It was so hurtful. A crew member spoke up and said, "Oh, you understood her okay." He conveyed the impression that it was not unusual for her to be so ugly.

To add insult to injury, we got a phone call saying the whole day's tape had been ruined and they'd like to spend another two days with me in Illinois. Since the other wives' interviews were "in the can," the office felt I must do it.

So we started over again with fear and trembling. Jane flew in and met me at a high school to redo the interview. I waited for a real zinger, but surprisingly, the interview was all sweetness and light. Several weeks went by, and then it was my morning on the air. I was very nervous, sitting alone in a California hotel room. The next seven minutes were spent with the *Today* show allowing me to say in every way possible just how great George Bush is. It was amazing. The man who edited the tape really did me a favor. I honestly feel he did it on purpose. I think he felt we had bonded on those bumpy, scary flights through the storm; that we had been good sports by spending two more days with them after their tape had been bad; and that Jane had been cruel in that first interview. When the seven minutes were over and the show went back to New York, Bryant Gumbel said, "The Bush campaign should have paid for that segment." Lucky me.

FROM **BARBARA BUSH: A MEMOIR**. CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS. 575 PP. \$25.



CAROL POWERS

LYON
NEW YORK'S HOMETOWN
STRIKE
THE DAILY NEWS WAR
AND THE FUTURE
OF AMERICAN LABOR
Richard Vigilante

CHEAP TALK

People who work with words all day have a tendency to believe that being good is mostly a matter of taking the right side — which one does by saying the right thing. Now the reporters were confronted by a choice that needed to be made in action. It had been so easy to judge when only words were at stake, when the judgments were only newsprint proclamations, expired in twenty-four hours. So accustomed were many of them to the primacy of word over deed that several who, in the course of the meeting, declaimed most passionately for solidarity and the strike changed their minds almost immediately thereafter and went back to work. Some reporters later said that the next few days, starting with the meeting and ending with their own personal decisions to go in or stay out, were the worst days of their entire lives. In the weeks that followed an inordinate amount of the press coverage of the strike would focus on the moral and emotional traumas of individual [Newspaper] Guild members, almost always reporters, wrestling with the decision to walk out or stay on the job. Most of these stories could hardly have interested the general public; but the reporters who wrote the stories seemed to find the intellectual gymnastics and moral agonies of their colleagues endlessly fascinating.

FROM **STRIKE: THE DAILY NEWS WAR AND THE FUTURE OF AMERICAN LABOR**, BY RICHARD VIGILANTE. SIMON & SCHUSTER. 319 PP. \$23.

NIX ON MORALITY

If reporters know that they are being manipulated by a politician for his own ends, why do they play his game? Why do they not use their critical faculties and ask whether the game is worth the candle or whether it serves some higher purpose?

Reporters often respond to such criticism by saying that the public can worry about morality, politicians about impact, and scholars about the future of democracy; reporters need worry only about the relevance and validity of the news they present. Traditionally, they strive for objectivity. They sometimes fall short. There have been occasions, such as the coverage of "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia, when some journalists have written their stories for the specific purpose of affecting national policy. Deborah Amos of ABC News and National Public Radio, speaking at the Kennedy School on April 7, 1994, acknowledged that while covering Bosnia she and a number of her colleagues had written the story with a view toward changing U.S. and NATO policy from diplomatic pressure to military action against Serbian forces.

To the degree that this change in professional attitude is simply a limited response to the anguish of covering a truly dreadful human tragedy such as the events in Bosnia, this may be



PHILIP LEBEL/STONIA

understandable, though still regrettable. But if reporters are now to adopt a moral attitude toward their stories, then the public is almost certain to be shortchanged. Nixon may be a despised figure to those Americans who remember the Watergate scandal and place him beyond the pale of respectable coverage, but he made news when he wrote his memo attacking the Bush administration's policy toward Russia and deserved the coverage. Detachment from the news for reasons of moral revulsion is not a luxury the press can afford.

FROM **THE NIXON MEMO: POLITICAL RESPECTABILITY, RUSSIA, AND THE PRESS**, BY MARVIN KALB. THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS. 227 PP. \$19.95.

BIG BROTHER, GOOD-BYE

Orwell's world, the world of computer and communications monopolies, will not be seen again in our lifetime. The loose ends and the forgotten corners have taken over. Computers, telephones, and televisions are now riddled with slots, ports, jacks, joysticks, mice, and SCSI interfaces, and surrounded by compact disks, videocameras, VCRs, scanners, screens, optical character readers, facsimile interfaces, sound synthesizers, projectors, and radio antennas. The plugs and jacks and sockets have taken over the telescreen world; the Ministry is dead. Every unfilled plug, every unconnected jack, is a loose end, a new entry into the network or an exit from it, a new soap box in Hyde Park, a new podium, a new microphone for poetry or prose, a new screen or telescreen for displaying private sentiment or fomenting sedition, for preaching the gospel, or peddling fresh bread.

FROM **ORWELL'S REVENGE**, BY PETER HUBER. THE FREE PRESS. 374 PP. \$22.95.



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The Lower case



Lieut. Gen. Howard D. Graves, Superintendent of the United States Military Academy, who disclosed yesterday that five members of the West Point football team had been accused of groping female cadets.

The New York Times 11/1/94

Democrats still retain control of neighborhood

Hyde Park Herald (Chicago) 11/16/94

Starving Angolans eating dogs, bark

The Pretoria (South Africa) News 9/10/94

FCC busy overlooking 6,500 cable complaints

Star Tribune (Minneapolis) 11/8/94

From latkes to oysters Rockefeller: Food for Hanukkah

Anchorage Daily News 11/23/94

Disney keeps touching kids

Springfield (Mo.) News-Leader 10/28/94

October is national breast awareness month

Madigan Mountaineer (Fort Louis, Wash.) 9/94

Dead couple 'overjoyed' at birth of their first child

The Ottawa (Canada) Citizen 10/15/94

Prince Charles backs bicycles over cars as he opens world talks

Daily News (Ludington, Mich.) 11/7/94

20th Century Given Deadline

Los Angeles Times 11/3/94

Lay position proposed by bishop for women

Denver (Va.) Register & Bee 10/11/94



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